

Andrey Vyacheslavovich Vasilchenko Citadel of Breslau. The last battle of the Great Patriotic

The liberation of Europe

THE LAST BATTLE OF THE GREAT | DOMESTIC

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annotation

The city of Breslau no longer exists. As a result of the War, he went to Poland and is now called Wrocław. It was Breslau, not Berlin, that became the last stronghold of the Nazi beast.

For eighty days, the besieged garrison and Volkssturm fighters offered desperate resistance to the Red Army, holding down the actions of 13 Soviet divisions. Hitler even appointed Gauleiter Breslau Karl Hanke as the last Reichsfuehrer of the SS. The recalcitrant city, which found itself in the deep Soviet rear, capitulated only on May 6, 1945, after the suicide of the Fuhrer and the fall of Berlin.

Soviet historians did not like to remember this last battle. But we must not forget the feat of the Soviet soldiers, who were able to block and force the most impregnable fortress of the Third Reich to surrender. Renowned historian Andrei Vasilchenko presents the most comprehensive study of the fall of Breslau.

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Introduction

Some of the domestic historians and history buffs know that the Silesian

the capital - the city of Breslau (the current Polish name is Wrocław!) - was besieged by Soviet troops for several months and capitulated only in May 1945. However, the general public is unlikely to know about the existence of such a "German Leningrad". She also hardly knows that during the siege in this city, most of the 250,000 civilians died, those same residents who, fearing the unknown and the hardships of evacuation, preferred to stay in their native city. And what almost no one knows is that it was possible to stop the bloodshed in this large German city thanks to risky negotiations conducted by representatives of the Evangelical and Catholic communities, despite the threat from the Gestapo. The very fact of such negotiations could end very badly for many Christian priests. The offer of surrender, even in 1945, continued to be regarded as defeatism, which, in turn, was equated with high treason. But it was this risky step that saved the lives of many residents.

The very long siege of this Silesian city in German historiography was called the "miracle of Breslau", which in itself indicates the uniqueness of such events. They began to write about the "miracle of Breslau" already in the 50s and 60s. Suffice it to mention the memoirs of the commandants von Alphen and Niehof "So Breslau Fought" used in writing this work, Hugo Hartung's fictional novel "The Sky Under Their Feet" and his published diary entries, Paul Peikert's notes "The Breslau Fortress in the Priest's Notes" and, of course, a detailed description of the life of the besieged city, which was given

eyewitness and active participant in these events, priest Ernst Hornig. It will seem strange, but the participants in those events were more restrained in their judgments than later researchers of this problem. In the late 70s and early 80s, interest in Breslau was again shown. But this interest is overtly political in nature. Polish researchers are trying to prove the legitimacy of their claims to Silesia (Tereza Sozańska, Ryszard Majeski, "The Battle of Breslau"), and German researchers are moving to outright nationalist positions, trying to focus on the atrocities perpetrated by the Red Army, and in particular by the Poles (series of publications in the journal "Landzer"). Franz Kurowski's work, *Hitler's Last Bastion*, published much later, devotes only a few pages to Breslau. The author, as if fearing accusations of bias, clearly does not want to notice the "miracle". However, all this heterogeneous material is an excellent foundation in order to write a work devoted to a plot little studied in Russian science - the siege of Breslau.

Breslau itself was a very ancient settlement. During the reign of the "barbarians" in Europe, the Breslau region was a large transshipment point where trade routes crossed, coming from the east (products and raw materials) and from the west (decorations and finished metal products). Later, trade routes began to cross here, which led from the Baltic Sea through Vienna to Venice. There was a lively trade in amber. Here also settled part of the furs, which was sent from Russia to the banks of the Rhine. In the 10th century, Breslau (already the residence of the bishop) with the territories adjacent to it up to the Oder, came under the control of Bohemia. A serious struggle unfolded for these lands. As a result, control over

they passed to the Silesian branch of the Piastov², who intermarried with the German princes. In 1241, the entire district was destroyed during a Mongol raid. The new founding of the city was closely associated with German settlers from Franconia, Thuringia and the Lower Rhine. In 1526

1 Hereinafter, only the German name of the city will be used.

2 Piasts (ÿ1ÿÿÿ) - Polish princely and royal dynasty.

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Silesia, together with Bohemia, came under the control of the Habsburg Empire. But in light of the fact that the Piast dynasty died out, the Prussian king Frederick II laid claim to Silesia. As a result, the so-called Silesian wars broke out, which Frederick II of Prussia waged against Maria Theresa and her allies. The First Silesian War lasted from 1740 to 1742. After the battles of Molwitz and Chotusitz, she brought Frederick to power over almost all of Silesia. The Second Silesian War was started by Frederick two years later as a result of the threatening behavior of Austria, England and Holland. It ended with the confirmation of the rights of Prussia to Silesia. The Third Silesian War was essentially part of the Seven Years' War. In 1762, Frederick finally ousted the Austrians from Silesia, having won several victories over them. On February 15, 1763, a peace treaty was concluded in Hubertusburg on the terms of *quasi erga omnes*. As a result, a new county of Glatz arose as part of Prussia. Austria retained control only over the southeastern part of Silesia, which became known as the county of Teschen with its capital in the city of the same name. In the 19th century Breslau became one of the largest cities in East Germany. If we talk about the time of the Nazi dictatorship, then as of 1939, 630 thousand people lived in it. With the outbreak of World War II, the city not only did not decrease, but, on the contrary, increased its population. This was primarily due to the fact that many military-significant industrial enterprises moved here, to Breslau, from the western outskirts of Germany. As a result, the population of Breslau exceeded one million people.

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The front of Army Group A, which later returned the old name - Army Group

"Center", by the beginning of 1945, passed through the territory of Poland, starting from BeskidZ up to the areas adjacent to the north to Warsaw. The front line, passing through the territory of present-day Poland, stabilized in the autumn of 1944 after the rapid Soviet offensive launched in June of that year. This Soviet avalanche went down in history under the name of Operation Bagration. The German generals saw that the strategic position of the Soviet troops, namely, the three bridgeheads located west of the Vistula, threatened the defense of such cities as Baranov, Pulawy and Magnuszew. But the German generals were much more worried about the significant numerical advantage of the Red Army: 11-fold in infantry, 7-fold in tanks, and simply incalculable in various types of artillery. After the war, one of the participants in these events wrote:

"It is possible that the Red Army, in order to intimidate the German troops, loudly announced that it would begin the offensive with artillery preparation, when there would be 250 guns per kilometer of the front. But the information about such grandiose batteries was neither disinformation nor a propaganda move, but the absolute truth!

Expected at the beginning of 1945 by the High Command of the German Ground Forces, a major Soviet offensive began on January 12. Shortly before this, somewhere in mid-December 1944, Guderian proposed to transfer part of the troops from the Western Front to the Eastern, as well as to form a strong reserve army, which would be located between Lodz and Hohensalz. Hitler refused to carry out this plan. He was more concerned about the military events in Hungary, where the Red Army stormed Budapest. The events in the south-east of Europe interested the Fuhrer, since he believed that the main strategic task of Germany was to maintain control over the oil regions of Hungary.

As mentioned above, Army Group A was forced to transfer a huge number of its units to the Hungarian region. Under these conditions, the chief of staff of the army group, Lieutenant General Xylander, together with staff officers and unit commanders, conducted staff exercises. Already in December 1944, there was growing concern in the military about the possibility of countering a major Soviet offensive. The estimated strength and direction of the Red Army's strikes were based on data supplied by intelligence over the past months. At the same time, German officers built their own "defense" in strict accordance with the units at their disposal. In the course of this staff exercise, which lasted eight hours according to some reports, and twelve hours according to others, a startling conclusion was drawn. In the course of a general offensive, Soviet troops on a wide front could approach the borders of Silesia in just six days. Under these conditions, the only real task for the headquarters of Army Group "A" could be the organization of defense in order to somehow prevent the advance of the Red Army in the direction

Ratibor and Glogauj.

Thus, the exercise showed that the forces at the disposal of Army Group A (neither at the front, nor in the reserves) were clearly not enough to prevent the Soviet troops from reaching the Silesian borders. Since it followed from the documents of Army Group A that its command did not count on replenishing reserves, it is quite logical that the German military began to look for another way to prevent a military catastrophe than defensive battles. Based on the available data, General Xylander began to prepare a draft of Operation Sledding. In general, this project looked like this: Not the strongest grouping of the Red Army, located south of the Vistula, was supposed to attack a section of the front along the Danuets River.

3 Beskydy is an elevated region of the Lesser Carpathians.

4 The current Polish name is Glogow.

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The purpose of this offensive was to cover the city of Tarnow from two sides. Such an operation by the Soviet troops would have made it possible to carry out a major offensive operation on the southern flank near the bend of the Vistula. It was further assumed that from the bridgehead in Baranovo, units of the 4th Ukrainian Front, commanded by Marshal Konev, with a significant advantage in tanks and artillery, would break through the German defenses and begin a rapid movement in the direction of the Oder, capturing Ratibor and Breslau. Having entrenched themselves in these areas, the Soviet troops, according to the German general, should have used these bridgeheads to further develop the offensive.

With all this, the German officers had no doubt that communication with the Wehrmacht units, which were located along the Vistula north of Baranov, would be instantly lost.

It was further assumed that the troops under the command of Marshal Zhukov, who were on the northern Vistula bridgehead near Magnuszew, would develop an offensive in the direction of Litzmanstadt (Lodz) and Poznan. The result of this operation was to be an exit to the Oder and a blockade on both sides of Frankfurt an der Oder. This would allow the Red Army to create a very advantageous bridgehead, opening the way to Berlin. The connection between these two major strategic breakthroughs in the German defense line was supposed to be maintained by a more modest grouping, which, as expected, was supposed to move in the direction of Radom from the bridgehead near Pulawy. It was this military group that would make it possible to quickly coordinate the actions of Zhukov and Konev.

The breakthrough of the German positions was to be preceded by a sudden and hurricane artillery preparation, which in the very first hours was to sweep away a significant part of the German troops on the defensive. The intelligence data provided to the headquarters of Army Group A left no doubt to Xylander - the multiple superiority of the Red Army in artillery in any case ensured a breakthrough of the defense line. In the event of a prolonged shelling, the German troops would simply be destroyed without entering the battle. The minimum number of reserves that Army Group A had at its disposal could not have stopped the Soviet tank offensive in Poland, even at natural barriers like the Pilica and Warta rivers.

Xylander intended to withdraw German units from hurricane fire, which would not only significantly reduce the number of losses, but also provide an opportunity to impose a series of defensive battles on the Soviet troops, which had advanced sharply forward, in which the Red Army would temporarily not be able to use its advantage in artillery. In addition, it was assumed that the Soviet troops, tired of the forced march, would not be masters of the situation. They will not themselves choose the time and place for battles. From a tactical point of view, this could be an advantage for the Germans, who could force them to fight when they were in more advantageous positions. At the same time, special attention was paid to the expansion of the combat area, which could split the tank fists of the Red Army, depriving them, at least in part, of their former penetrating ability. Since the surroundings of the Vistula were in no way suitable for solving this problem, since the Red Army had three winning bridgeheads there, it was decided that the area of the former German-Polish border would be ideal for imposing battles. It was assumed that the vastly outnumbered Soviet troops would get bogged down in a series of small battles, and as a result, the Soviet general offensive would stall and stop. As you can see, Army Group A had only one chance, which gave at least a meager, but still the opportunity to intercept the strategic initiative. But for this, I repeat, it was necessary to withdraw the German troops from the fire of the Soviet artillery, which meant a well-prepared retreat. Only in this way would the Germans be able to more or less successfully use their tiny reserves. But the retreat was to begin as close as possible to the beginning of the Soviet general offensive. If the retreat had started too early, then the headquarters of the Red Army could understand that the plan had been discovered. In this situation, the Soviet troops could at any time carry out

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regrouping. Ideally, the two nights preceding the Soviet offensive were suitable for retreating from the front line of the German troops. But in this situation, the only problem was to establish the exact date of the start of the operation. The command of Army Group A relied on intelligence data, considering them to be extremely accurate. In the end, the idea was partly justified. The Red Army was to unleash artillery fire on empty positions or territories held by very small military groups. But this did not exclude the risk that artillery fire, with early recognition of the German intention, could be transferred from the forward part of the front to the operational rear, to places where ammunition depots continued to be located. Moreover, the timely recognition of the German maneuver could turn into a swift throw

Soviet tanks.

To avoid these dangers, the German withdrawal from the front had to be only the first act, followed by a powerful counterattack. Only in this way could the German grouping in Silesia maintain the combat initiative. At the headquarters of the army group, it was believed that when the Soviet command became aware that the artillery preparation had not reached its goals, the offensive would be curtailed, and the advancing units of the Red Army would move forward more cautiously, so to speak, by feel.

The Germans' calculation was simple: The lack of military equipment and manpower was supposed to be compensated by a counterattack with all the troops at their disposal, which were to be sent to destroy the "tips" of the Soviet wedges aimed deep into the German positions. As a result, it was decided that all available reserves and most of the infantry had to be thrown into the complete destruction of one of the Soviet wedges, while in other directions the advancing units of the Red Army had to get bogged down in battles. The Germans had to choose new positions for defense, which were at least temporarily inaccessible to Soviet artillery. After the destruction of one of the wedges, it was supposed to transfer, again, all those who had the strength to destroy the other.

As a result, the command of Army Group "A" developed the following operational plan. The German units evaded battles with the Soviet units going into the breakthrough, giving defensive battles only in new positions, which were located near Hubertusburg. Then Army Group A, with the forces of all those with reserves and tank equipment, was to attack the Soviet units advancing from the bridgehead near Magnushev, take them into pincers and destroy them. This offensive operation was to be carried out by the forces of the 9th Army with the support of the XXTU and KhG tank corps.

In addition to the actual hostilities, an important part of the plan developed by Xylander was the evacuation of the departments of the 4th Panzer Army and the southern wing of the 9th Army, as well as a significant part of the civilian institutions of the Polish "Governor General" behind the Krakow-Pilica-Lodz line.

By Christmas 1944, that is, by December 24, a detailed plan for Operation Sledding was submitted to the German High Command of the Ground Forces, which generally approved it, but, deciding to play it safe, transferred it to the Wehrmacht High Command for approval. In the Wehrmacht High Command, which was more politicized, it was much more difficult to get approval for this plan.

In anticipation of the approval of the plan in the frontline zone, units of Army Group A began to prepare to leave the occupied territories and withdraw to the operational rear. Once again, all calculations were made, the readiness for withdrawal to the positions to Hubertusburg, where defensive fortifications were already being prepared, was checked. In the meantime, German intelligence was able to obtain information that the winter general offensive of the Red Army would begin either on January 11 or 12. In accordance with this date, specific measures were taken to start a tactical withdrawal.

Later, one of the officers of the headquarters of Army Group "A" will recall:

"In early January, we carried out part of the planned measures to disinform the enemy in the area of the Baranovsky bridgehead. The enemy should not have revealed our plans. But it was very difficult to maintain secrecy, since the appearance of Soviet reconnaissance aircraft in this region became more frequent.

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Meanwhile, the chief of the general staff of the ground forces, Guderian, did everything possible to save the Eastern Front from disaster. He tried to convince the dogmatic Hitler. Guderian's proposals boiled down, in fact, to one point - it was necessary to transfer the fully equipped 6th SS Panzer Army from the Western to the Eastern Front to the Oder region as soon as possible. He supported the plan for Operation Sledding and strongly opposed the madness that Hitler conceived in

Hungaryb. With the implementation of these measures, Guderian was ready to eliminate the threat looming over East Prussia. Then it was possible to unblock the "fortress" Courland. A new general offensive on the Eastern Front could be launched on this bridgehead, where troops would be transferred by sea.

But all attempts to change Hitler's mind were in vain. Everything remained in its place. He didn't even want to hear about a tactical retreat. As a result, it was forbidden to carry out the operation "Sledding".

On January 12, 1945, as German intelligence expected, the general offensive of the Red Army began. As Xylander predicted, the Soviet artillery preparation literally swept away all the advanced units of the Wehrmacht. Thousands of soldiers died without even joining the battle! On January 20, that is, 8 days after the start of the offensive, the advanced tank units of the Red Army approached the border of Silesia. The situation became critical. Xylander, as the author of the draft of Operation Sledding, told one of his employees:

"If we manage to intercept the rapid Russian offensive at the A-1 line, or at least at the Silesian border, then we can say that our mission is completed. More is unlikely to be achieved. In this case, the industry of Upper Silesia will continue its work, supplying our army, which will throw the enemy out of German soil. Thanks to this, the top leadership of the Reich will be able to buy time and turn the current military situation into a political act.

Another German officer recalled that Xylander was a responsible and far-sighted military leader who followed Moltke's words that "strategy is a system of supports." But Xylander's words were not destined to come true. Hitler's strategy proved disastrous for Germany. Xylander himself died on February 14 during a flight to Dresden. In those days, the once flourishing Breslau was already solid ruins.

As you can see, even before the start of the winter offensive of 1945, individual representatives of the German command developed plans that would have avoided disaster. But these plans were not destined to come true, since Hitler himself resolutely opposed them.

The offensive of the units of the 4th Ukrainian Front, commanded by Marshal Konev, started from the Sandomer bridgehead (in German literature, it is referred to as the Baranovsky bridgehead). The offensive was so powerful that parts of the 4th Panzer Army were almost instantly destroyed. Due to the fact that the operational reserves in this sector were located too close to the front line, they were destroyed along with the tank units. Many of them never entered the battle, as they were swept away during a hurricane of artillery preparation. As the German staffers assumed, already on January 18, 1945, units of the Red Army approached the borders of Silesia. The next day they entered the territory of Upper Silesia, the only properly functioning industrial region of Germany at that time.

6 In Hungary, it was planned to release the blockade of Budapest, for which huge FORCES were transferred there.

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On January 20, Soviet troops occupied Kreutzburg/ and Rosenberg⁸. On February 1, units of the Red Army entered the industrial area, which had previously not been actually touched by air

raids and bombardments. Russian troops advanced up to the Beiten⁹, Gleiwitz¹⁰, Alt-Kozel line. Soviet troops quickly reached the districts of Breslau Brig¹¹ and

Steinau ¹². It was from here that the encirclement of Breslau began in the first days of February. German troops were unable to resist him. On February 15, 1945, the encirclement around Breslau was closed.

The German line of defense collapsed almost overnight when the Red Army units began their winter general offensive. Already after the war, German generals, as if justifying themselves, said that they were doing everything possible to prevent a catastrophe. They blamed the collapse of the front on Hitler. They were partly right - it was Hitler who deprived Army Group A of all reserves and most of the tanks of equipment, transferring them to Budapest, to which he paid much more attention than the territory of Silesia, from where the gates to Berlin opened. The lack of operational reserves and a too thin line of defense, according to the German military, led to the fact that the capital of Lower Silesia, the city of Breslau, was drawn into the maelstrom of hostilities too early.

7th regional center in Upper Silesia, as of 1937 - 12,800 inhabitants. The Polish name is Klyuchbork.

8 Regional center in Upper Silesia. As of 1937 - 6100 inhabitants. The Polish name is Olesno.

d, Upper Beiten, a city in Upper Silesia, 51,000 inhabitants; the center of the Upper Silesian mining and metallurgical industry, coal mines, zinc and lead ores.

10 Gleiwitz - 52 thousand inhabitants. Center of the Upper Silesian mining and metalworking industry, mechanical engineering and glass industry.

11 38500 inhabitants, the Polish name is Brzeg.

12 5100 inhabitants, the Polish name is Scinawa.

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Chapter 2

After the Red Army advanced as far as the Carpathians and the Middle Vistula during the summer offensive of 1944, it actually found itself at the gates of Warsaw and the borders of East Prussia. It was at this time that Hitler ordered the implementation of a plan to build a series of defensive fortifications. In August 1944, many cities in the "German East" were proclaimed "fortresses". Among them was Breslau.

In fact, Breslau was never a fortress as such. The only real military fortifications in it were the bastions erected during the Napoleonic wars. For more than a hundred years, no one perceived Breslau as a military facility, and even more so as a fortress. However, with the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, the Silesian capital was urgently "reinforced", that is, equipped with prefabricated defense fortifications. The city also had

food stocks were formed that could be used in the event of a siege. These military buildings, which received the name of "infantry installations", I-Verkov (I-Verk), survived until the Second World War. They were fortifications built from not the highest quality concrete. In principle, I-Verki could protect against bullets and small-caliber shell fragments, but by no means against heavy artillery. They could be used as command posts as well as shelter from bad weather. But neither in 1914, nor later, in 1944, real fortifications were erected in the city. In total, there were twelve infantry buildings in Breslau. Five of them were located on the northern borders slightly south of the dammed pastures, two more - in the southeast, and five - in the southwest and west. During the Weimar Republic, when the Versailles dictatorship reigned, which very significantly limited the possibilities for the development of army affairs, the Reichswehr managed, under the guise of dams protecting the city from floods and Oder spills, to build some reinforced concrete structures that looked more like bunkers equipped with machine gun nests. But the real combat value of all these fortifications was negligible. That is why it is impossible to speak of Breslau as a "classical fortress". His proclamation as such in 1944 was more of a symbolic gesture that indicated the exceptional importance of this city. Indeed, Breslau was not only the heart of Silesia, but also a major transport hub, which was located only some 300 kilometers from the bridgehead in Baranow, from where the Red Army could (and did) launch its offensive. So the appearance of the Breslau Fortress was just a confirmation of the seriousness of the military situation in the East.

What was required for Breslau to turn from an "open city" as it was before the war into a "fortress"? Only a short list of what was appropriate to have a fortress can be given. This is the commandant of the fortress with his own headquarters, these are the fortress troops and the fortress garrison separate from them. These are fortress guns, a separate telephone and telegraph communication center, at least a semblance of an airfield, which would allow

supply the fortress by air!3. These are warehouses with a huge amount of various stocks: ammunition, weapons, ammunition, fuel, medicines and dressings, food. And, of course, the fortress is the bastions.

This huge list of necessary conditions for the emergence of a "real" fortress began to be implemented with a huge delay. The first commandant of the fortress, Major General Krause, was not in a hurry with the "serf work". Yes, and he was appointed commandant with a huge delay. Let me remind you that Breslau was proclaimed a fortress in August, and the commandant at the fortress appeared only on September 25th. But much worse than a waste of time was the unclear situation in the city of the commandant of the fortress and his headquarters. They acquired their real status only in February 1945, when the Red Army soldiers were already storming the suburbs of Breslau.

13 The appearance of the first fortress - Demyansk, under which a large German group fell into the Soviet encirclement in 1942, is inextricably linked with the existence of "air

bridge."

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When, in the summer of 1944, Hitler signed an order declaring Breslau, like several other cities, a "fortress", no one seemed to take the Fuhrer's order seriously. Even party officials thought it was just a nice gesture. This is evidenced at least by the fact that in the few months since Breslau was proclaimed a "fortress", no one has done anything to strengthen its defense capability. No one thought to prepare for the defense of the city. As a result, a high dam located south of the city, along which four railway tracks ran, turned out to be unprotected. The very same building was in a very unfavorable place for the defense of the city. But Gauleiter

Hanke¹⁴ did not even think of correcting something in this situation. He, in his capacity as Reich Commissar for Defense, preferred to launch the pompous action "Barthold", during which

anti-tank ditches and fortifications were erected almost in the area of the former German-Polish border. As a result, they were fairly removed from the city. As practice has shown, all these preparations turned out to be a waste of time. There was no way to use these fortifications during the siege of the city. Erich Schoenfelder, an officer who took part in the defense of Breslau, recalled on this occasion:

"The plan for turning Breslau into a fortress provided for the presence of an outer and an inner ring. The outer ring of defense was to be 120 kilometers long. Five divisions were to occupy positions at this turn. It was supposed to stretch from Trebnitz, through Bingerau, Poike, Fünfteichen, the village of Merz, Rotzürben, Kant, cross the Oder and end at the same Trebnitz. The construction of this frontier was a purely party project."

Even if this defensive line had been built on time, the question naturally arises: could five German divisions have been able to gain a foothold on it in time in the event of a real threat from the Red Army? The answer to it was given by the swift Soviet offensive, which put an end not only to the construction of an external defensive line, but also to all plans for the defense of the city.

From the very beginning of its activity, the headquarters of the fortress was supposed to serve as the headquarters of a division, and possibly even a larger military unit. But the requirements of General Krause to create a special headquarters of the corps, as well as an independent headquarters of fortress sappers, to which the forces erecting the "fortress" would be subordinate, were not fulfilled.

Actually, only the garrison battalion and infantry battalion 599, which were staffed by old and sick people, were directly subordinate to the commandant of the fortress. During the autumn of 1944, the army command made a lot of efforts to form a full-fledged fortress garrison, reporting directly to the commandant. In Breslau, six fortress artillery batteries and one company of communications and sappers were formed. Fortress batteries, by and large, were not army

14 Karl August Hanke was born on August 24, 1903 in the town of Lauban, which was located in the government district of Liegnitz in the province of Lower Silesia. Hanke's father worked on the railway as a locomotive engineer, and the family, although not rich, was not poor. Hanke had a younger brother - he died during World War II. For four years, Karl attended a folk school in Lauban, and in 1914 he entered the gymnasium. On August 7, 1920, Hanke entered the Reichswehr as a "temporary volunteer". He was sent to serve in the 19th Infantry Regiment, stationed near Frankfurt an der Oder. After leaving the army in August 1921, Hanke entered the German Milling School in Dippolswalde and, after graduating in 1923, worked for a year in the railway depot of his native Lauban and in the flour mill. After that he worked for three years as manager of various mills in Silesia, Bavaria and Tyrol. In the 1920s, Hanke joined the National Socialist movement, but so far it was only about the political sympathies of the young man. In 1928, Hanke completed courses at the Pedagogical Institute (Vegiybördyaroröyşşep shi) in Berlin and received the right to teach at a real school (for teaching the same flour-grinding business). In the same year he joined the school in Berlin-Steglitz as a flour miller. In the same year, his party career began. On November 1, 1928, he joined the NSDAP, received ticket No. 102 606, and in 1929 - in the SA (until 1931 he was listed in the SA reserve).

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in parts, they consisted of Volkssturmists who had completed two weeks of preparatory courses. They were armed mainly with captured guns: French, Soviet, Yugoslav, Polish. Some of them were deprived of optical guidance devices and shooting tables, which, after the encirclement of the city, could only be delivered by air bridge. There were very few stocks for arming the Volkssturm units. Generally

the formation of self divisions constantly faced enormous material difficulties.

In general, the units being created could hardly be called a classic "fortress garrison". In addition, General Krause was not empowered to use the formations of the ground forces, the Waffen-SS and the Luftwaffe to replenish the garrison. They obeyed him only in matters of internal order during their stay in Breslau, which had nothing to do with combat use.

In the city itself, a strange situation developed. The "fortress" had neither fortifications nor fortress guns, but military hospitals and medical personnel were in abundance. From September 1944 to the end of January 1945, Breslau did not resemble a fortress in any way. General von Alphen, who became the next commandant of the fortress, wrote in his memoirs:

"I could not get rid of the feeling that the order given in August 1944 by the High Command here, as well as in many other places, was not taken seriously. How else can one explain the omissions, the main of which I will list below: the absence of the main headquarters, which would have been engaged in the transformation of Breslau into a fortress right from August 1944; insufficient level of organization of fortress troops; insufficient armament and poor supply of ammunition; missing the opportunity to supply the city by air in case siege."

In addition, no attention was paid to the fact that the sappers began the implementation of technical measures in time, the implementation of which would allow Breslau to cope with his tasks as a fortress. At that moment, the army command did not even make inquiries about how the defense of large cities was carried out during the Second World War. Although it seemed self-evident to find a competent artilleryman and sapper, signalman and officer knowledgeable in air supply problems, so that they would not only thoroughly study all the territories adjacent to the city, but also work out several options for a possible development of events behind the maps. Actually the quartermaster - Colonel Hauenschild - was appointed only after numerous demands and requests from General Krause. However, in November 1944, due to the length of service (the colonel was of a very advanced age), he was relieved of this post. For some time in Breslau, no one dealt with supply and supply issues. The new quartermaster - a young major - appeared in Breslau only in January 1945. He immediately began to actively work, but time was lost, the city was supposed to plunge into chaos from day to day. In any case, the lack of clear military leadership in advance reduced Breslau's chances of military success. Perhaps the high command was reassured by the fact that the defense of Silesia had to be carried out by soldiers, mainly mobilized from the local population. However, in Breslau itself, the limited rights of the commandant of the fortress led to the fact that the soldiers did not receive proper training, they were not even given tactical training on the ground. In Hartung's novel *The Sky Under Their Feet*, it is very colorfully shown that Breslau, which was not really any fortress, was defended by Wehrmacht soldiers, who by and large were not soldiers. In it, in one of the episodes, it is described that the mobilized residents did not receive any training.

Apart from the few weak defenses that Breslau had on the eve of the war, there was no military infrastructure in the city. For this reason, it was necessary to first create a line of defense. Its main contours were outlined as early as late August - early September 1944, that is, on the eve of the arrival of General Krause. Breslau's problem also lay in the fact that there was no unity of command on a number of issues. So, for example, Breslau, like all "eastern fortresses", from a tactical point of view, obeyed

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Colonel General Strauss, whose headquarters was located in Frankfurt an der Oder. But at the same time, in matters of supply, the troops located in the vicinity of the city had to obey

command of the 8th military district. For the defense of Breslau, five divisions were provided, three of which were to be located on the east, and the remaining two on the west bank of the Oder.

As mentioned above, the creation of defensive structures began very late. And the very fact of the beginning of their construction was largely connected with the inspection trip of Colonel-General Guderian to the Glogau fortress. There were old fortifications erected in the 19th century, but, unlike Breslau, in Glogau the emphasis was placed on expanding the so-called "inner ring". Its undoubted tactical advantage was that it could be held even by insignificant fighting forces. However, there were no forces in Breslau to build a defense line with a length of almost 120 kilometers. In addition, only five divisions were to operate on this long stretch. It is impossible to write off the negative impact that the local Gauleiter had. However, as the Imperial Commissioner for Defense, they had no right not to listen to his voice. As a result, in January 1945, all available forces were thrown into the creation of the "inner ring" in Breslau. In a hurry, it was possible to create some semblance of defensive structures.

But one should not forget that in the rush to create the "inner ring" many miscalculations were made. From the south and southeast, Breslau was surrounded by a powerful railway dam. In the fall of 1944, the head of the Yug construction headquarters, Captain Ebergardt Seifert, proposed using this technical facility to equip ammunition depots and premises that the troops might need. This decision was short-sightedly rejected. Firstly, army officials referred to the lack of specialists needed for this. Secondly, this decision was opposed by the leadership of the Reichsbahn, which intended to use the railway tracks passing along the dam as spare lines that could come in handy in the event of active air raids on Breslau stations. The reason that such strange doubts were not immediately eliminated must be sought in the fact that the sapper units did not have a competent commander, and the fortress headquarters was not fully staffed. The miners of the Upper Silesian region were a sufficient force capable of making several permanent fortifications in the dam, which, without any harm to the railway, could be used during the battles for the "inner ring".

If the "outer ring" of defense remained half-finished, then it still was not useless. These structures were used by the German units much later for their sorties, which lasted until the spring of 1945.

On January 12, 1945, the Soviet offensive began. Since the Wehrmacht did not have the slightest opportunity to stop him, two measures were taken that were of exceptional importance for Breslau. These were the hasty bringing of the fortress garrison to combat readiness and the organization of defense to the east of the Oder and on both sides of Breslau, as well as the urgent evacuation
population.

Regarding the evacuation of civilians in the city, General Krause made several proposals back in December, which were never implemented. He wrote:

"By the end of 1944, the population of Breslau is about 1 million people. Also, many industrial enterprises were moved to this region, as it was seen as a kind of bomb shelter for the Greater German Reich. After Breslau was proclaimed a fortress, mobilization activities began to be carried out in its civilian sector. Their implementation in December 1944 was supervised by a special commission sent from Berlin. The commandant of the fortress also took part in its activities. On paper, the preparation was exemplary. For the evacuation of the civilian population, more than a hundred trains were to be provided daily. But the commandant expressed doubts about Breslau's ability to receive such a large number of trains at the same time. Therefore, he suggested to the Gauleiter in advance

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evacuate approximately 200,000 old people, children, young mothers and pregnant women. After listening to the proposal, the Gauleiter replied: "And where should I go with these people? The Fuhrer will ask me to shoot myself if now, in a calm situation, I come to him with such deeds."

The evacuation order was issued only on January 19, that is, eight days after the start of the Soviet offensive. Such haste led to enormous difficulties and sacrifices, which, with good organization, could have been avoided.

At first, military events did not develop too rapidly. But among the civilian population, various rumors were already multiplying. On the evening of January 18, the inhabitants of Breslau heard a siren. The city had not actually been bombed before. Breslau was bombed only in October and December 1944. The last air raid came just in time for Christmas. Then the Christmas trees lit up with all the lights stood right on the streets under the open sky. For the pilots, this was a great goal. Amazingly, even at the end of 1944 in Breslau, no one thought to observe blackout. They flew to the city

bombs. One of them exploded in the east wing of the Betanin Hospital⁵, located on Kloster Strasse. No one died from the explosion. The victims were about a thousand windows that were shattered by a powerful explosion of a bomb. The evangelical institution "Betanin" was located on a narrow strip of land that ran between the Kloster Strasse and the Ole stream, which flowed into the Oder in Breslau. It was a large complex that included a modern hospital, a nursing home and a church. A large team of sisters of mercy worked in Betanina. It was the center of charitable work that was carried out throughout Silesia.

On January 18, priest Loeffler visited Lodz (Litzmannstadt) with forty sisters, where

visited the deaconess monastery there⁶, after which he continued his trip to Grünberg. On January 20, reports began to circulate throughout the district through the Betanina line that women and children had to leave Breslau as a matter of urgency. In a hurry, parents took their children from Betanin, who studied at the local school. The sudden evacuation order plunged the inhabitants of the city into a state of deep shock. This was not surprising, because until that moment all the reports and reports in the newspapers were silent about the seriousness of the situation. If it was said about a possible threat, then its size was significantly underestimated. To all this was added the fact that many parents in a terrible hurry tried to pick up their children, who had previously been sent to the village for safety reasons. Two streams collided. On the one hand, they were refugees from the East, on the other, people who wanted to find their children. Suddenly there was chaos on the roads. The traffic began to resemble a seething stream. Many of the parents, having not reached their goal, embittered and disappointed, were forced to turn back. The number of separated families grew larger and larger every hour. Numerous mothers were looking for their children. The youth was sent to carry out the tasks set within the framework of Operation Barthold. The men were mobilized into the Volkssturm detachments. Many abandoned their apartments, trying to escape from the city.

As mentioned above, the city was not actually subjected to air raids. The October bombing claimed the lives of only 69 people. Taking into account the situation at the front, the military command proposed as early as December 1944 to urgently evacuate women and children from the city. The Gauleiter apparatus was to be responsible for this task. But in response to this proposal, Gauleiter Paul Hanke declared that he strongly opposed the urgent evacuation. The implementation of this plan, in his opinion, "would contribute to the growth of defeatism among the population." That's when the perniciousness of the dual government - of party and army structures - manifested itself! Up to this point, it had resembled a symbiosis, a harmless coexistence. But in a critical situation, such dual power turned into a huge disaster. Only when the tank columns

15 Betanin is the traditional name for German clinics, which means concentrated beetroot juice (E162).

16 Evangelical sisters of mercy.

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The Red Army reached the borders of Upper and Lower Silesia, Gauleiter Hanke literally at the last moment gave the order for an emergency evacuation. This happened on January 19, 1945. At first, this concerned only residents of rural areas located on the right (eastern) bank of the Oder. The next day it was decided that the order applied to women and children living in Breslau.

On January 20, 1945, the first columns of refugees moving from the east reached Breslau. In 20-degree frost, under a piercing cold wind, they crossed the Oder. Old men, women and children, laden with their belongings, moved slowly westward. Some of them wanted to take refuge in the Silesian mountains, someone intended to take refuge in Saxony or Thuringia. These days, the frightened inhabitants of Breslau could see a strange picture - long columns of refugees, where instead of horses carts were dragged by old people and teenagers. In the midst of these wagons, here and there, cars flashed by, in which sat party functionaries dressed in brown uniforms. Those who watched this spectacle drove away terrible thoughts from themselves. Many understood that the refugees were doomed to suffer from cold and hunger, since they would have nowhere to settle. The refugees from the Silesian villages did not even have food supplies. The women of Breslau stopped breathing in horror when they heard an emergency radio message on January 20. The next day it was repeated with rare insistence from all the speakers hanging on the streets of the city:

"Attention! Attention! Women with children should walk along one of the streets of the Opperau district in the direction of Kant! The final collection point is the southern suburbs."

Chaos and confusion arose almost instantly at all stations. This was due to the fact that many women followed the call. In the middle of the cold night, they were on their way with suitcases and prams (if the children were small). Often, carriages were replaced by sleds - deep snow lay on the streets of Breslau. After several hours of tedious march, many of them tried to find a warm room and at least some semblance of a kitchen to warm food for the little ones. But almost all these attempts were in vain. To move faster, many of the mothers threw away their belongings, packed in bags and backpacks. But it didn't help everyone. Tragedy awaited many - by morning, many kids died from the cold. They had to be buried next to the road. About 40 children were buried in the area of the New Market on the Market Square alone. Only during the first night of the flight from Breslau, 50 fresh children's graves grew in the area of the southern park. Many more such tragic examples could be cited. The death of these children was on the conscience of Gauleiter Hanke, who did not heed the advice of General Krause and did not begin the evacuation of the city's residents in a timely manner. The sad news about the mass death of children began to spread rapidly throughout the city. These messages finally confirmed the intention of the inhabitants of Breslau to stay at home. They did not want to risk and flee in the cold and without food. Many comforted themselves with the thought that this was their home, their beds, food and coal supplies. Many, not without ostentatious heroism, said that it was better to die in their native city than to die on the side of the road from cold and hunger. As a result, almost 200 thousand people who were to be evacuated remained in Breslau. They were joined by another 10 thousand people from the vicinity of Breslau and nearby villages, who did not have time to break through to the south or west. They could only find refuge in the Silesian capital. By the time of the encirclement, there were more than 250,000 potential refugees in Breslau who preferred to stay "at home".

How the face of Breslau completely changed in a few days, a Silesian peasant from the district of Lüben told:

"I farmed in the Luben district. On January 17, I was supposed to arrive in Breslau to take a course for junior commanders at the Volkssturm. Upon arrival, we found out that the courses had been delayed by three days. Until January 20, I decided to stay with my sister-in-law. On January 17, the city lived its own life and nothing said that on January 20 everything would change radically. IN

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That day I felt like I was in a completely different city. The station did not accommodate all the people. Even the railway workers called for dispersal. The trains ran, but they arrived with a very large late."

Several sisters of mercy from "Betanina" on Saturday, January 20, still managed to get

after visiting Obernigk¹⁷ - a town in the district of Trebnitz - to the northeast of Breslau, where their institution patronized several nursing homes and family holiday homes. The sisters of mercy helped several elderly people get on the train. They could not return back, although they planned to return to the city by evening train. Not wanting to leave the elderly to their fate, they walked 26 kilometers at night. The eldest daughter of the priest Ernst Hornig (later this clergyman will play a significant role in the fate of the city) also tried to escape. Equipped with warm clothes and food, she could only get to Trebnitz, after which, with difficulty, she returned to Breslau on the last train. In his memoirs, Hornig recalled with relief that his wife, who was expecting her seventh child, was able to leave the city just a day before chaos broke out there. She took refuge in Hirschberg. The priest himself helped the whole family (with the exception of the eldest son, who already served in the Wehrmacht) to move there, after which he returned to Breslau, because he "did not want to leave the community of St. Barbara unattended." But it is possible that he showed conformity, since shortly before this, the leadership of the Confessing Church circulated a circular, which at first concerned only the priests of Berlin and Brandenburg, in which the clergy were urged to remain in their communities even in the conditions of the approaching front and not to take into account the threat of hostilities.

January 21 will forever remain in the history of the city as "Black Sunday". This was due to the fact that he unexpectedly fell into the ring of the Soviet encirclement, which threatened to close at any moment. Many assumed that on Monday the first Soviet tanks would appear on the streets of the city. By Sunday evening, the Imperial Bridge was mined.

On January 22, the provincial authorities either ceased their activities or completely cowardly disappeared from the city. Officials and employees were given untimely leave and officially allowed to leave Breslau. The only exceptions were those who, in a fit of enthusiasm, enrolled in the Volkssturm or were assigned to the Wehrmacht. The University of Breslau would be moved to Dresden on the same day. By the end of the day, the Technical University, university hospitals, which had previously been located in the Scheitnig area, were also transferred there. But at the same time, almost none of the university professors did not want to leave their hometown. This intention contrasted with the empty courthouses, the new government seat at Lessing Square, and the labor exchange at Oderkron station. The Evangelical Consistory of the Silesian diocese, located on the Palace Square, was not going to be evacuated either. Moreover, both heads of the consistory, Christoph Cracker von Schwarzenwald and Walter Linzel, ended up in the Volkssturm. The helplessness and cowardice of party structures and authorities is shown by an entry made in the Betanina magazine:

"Tonight, Consistorial Counsellor, Mr. Buchsel, received bad news from Senior Consistorial Councilor Schwartz about our situation. He woke the sisters and began to prepare them for their departure. But before that, he called the Gauleiter's office, the chief of police, and even the senior staff doctor Semmler. Everyone assured him that it was only panic rumors... Nevertheless, our President-Chairman D. Hosemann, together with the Senior Consistorial Councilor Schwartz, went to Görlitz, where the consistory was transferred. In the morning we found out

that the battle group "Olav Gates" retreated to the rear. Thus, the official messages we received during the day often contradicted each other.

17 A place called Oborniki in Polish.

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When, on the same day, Consistorial Counselor Buchsel hinted at the competent authorities of the battle group about the need to move nursing homes, he was told that only mothers and children were to be evacuated. At the same time, he was cynically reminded that the hasty actions of January 20-21 did not bring the desired result. Like, why the rush, it's just an increase in panic. And in the evening of the same day, the news came to Betanin that women,

who stayed in the mother's house in Obernigk, were urgently taken to Jauer!8.

On January 23, a meeting of the leaders of the parsonage of evangelical church communities was held, which was led by the deputy dean of the city church council of Bessert, who served in the memorial church of Queen Louise. The dean of the city council, Walter Lierse himself, at that time represented church interests outside of Breslau. Almost all 24 communities were represented at the meeting. It must be said that Breslau was predominantly an evangelical city. The main issue was the endangered spiritual nourishment of the inhabitants of the city. Of particular concern was the number of victims who did not have time to be buried and buried. The chaos and confusion that reigned in the city threatened to completely collapse the order of burials that existed before. There were not enough working hands to dig graves, and the frozen ground did not allow them to be dug very quickly. The number of suicides in the city has also been a cause for concern. Many people went crazy, although the fighting had not yet begun in the city. But even under these conditions, the priests tried to bury people in accordance with Christian rites. However, each time it became more and more difficult. In the journal Betanina, an entry was left about one of these cases:

"We did not have the opportunity to bury a 12-year-old boy who tried to pull a cart himself, but was hit by a tram not far from our house."

The burial was further hampered by the fact that almost all large cemeteries were located outside the city: Rotkrechsham and Dürrgoy - to the southeast of the city, Grabschen - in the southwest, Kosel - in the west, Ozwitz - in the northwest. All these places were occupied by the Red Army. But, nevertheless, both evangelicals and Catholics over the next few weeks tried to bury the dead and the dead. This went on until March 1945. Then the number of corpses became so huge that it simply could not even be counted.

On January 24, the military situation of the city became critical. The reports of the Wehrmacht command that day reported the following:

"On the Oder, in the area between Kozel and Brig, the enemy onslaught has increased significantly." The next day, January 25, it was reported

"decisive counterattacks undertaken east of Breslau": "The enemy advance detachments approached Breslau from the southeast. All attempts to enter the city from the east have failed.

Meanwhile, Batanin, with the support of the regional leadership of the Hitler Youth, was able to

evacuate to Gross-Badis (at Liegnitz! 9) the girls' house from Deutsch-Liss. Needless to say, no one imagined that very soon the environs of Liegnitz would come under Soviet control: the Red Army would take the Luben region on February 9, and on February 10 its advance detachments would penetrate Liegnitz. During this offensive, several railway lines will be cut.

lines: Breslau-Glogau-Berlin, Breslau-Lignitz-Goerlitz, Liegnitz-Sagan-Berlin, Breslau Königszelt-Hirschberg. By February 9, free movement

18 Current Polish name Jawor.

19 The Polish name is Legnica.

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could only be preserved along the Breslau-Zobten²⁰-Schweidnitz²¹ railway line. But a few days later, Soviet troops cut it too. But before Breslau was completely surrounded, the Gauleiter's apparatus again appealed to the population to leave the city. On January 26, posters were posted around the city that called for:

"Women of any age, as well as men over 60 or under 16, must leave the city. In order to preserve the possibility of transporting the sick and the elderly, all able-bodied persons must leave Breslau on foot."

But for the reasons described above, the population was in no hurry to follow such calls. It is the psychological attitude of the inhabitants of Breslau that explains why so many people remain in it. The structures of the National Socialist Party deliberately downplayed the number of civilians remaining in the city. Some documents listed 180 thousand people, and some even had a fantastic figure - 80 thousand people! This behavior is easy enough to explain. The deliberate reduction in the number of civilians allowed party functionaries in the future (and they still hoped to win the war) to evade responsibility for the insufficient initiative shown in the evacuation of the civilian population. In addition, a significant number of civilians from a purely military point of view made it difficult to defend the city. It was an ostrich tactic. The party members "hid their heads in the sand", believing that fictitious numbers could help them in real life. There is a lot of evidence that at that time between 230,000 and 250,000 civilians remained in Breslau: these are the calculations of representatives of church structures, and the analysis of Jürgen Thorwald, given in the work "The Great Flight". At least one figure spoke of the true number of civilians remaining in Breslau - the number of ration cards issued during the siege by the local party structure. However, no one counted the number by district, which was due to the constant "migration" of the surviving citizens and refugees. It is also difficult to say what was the proportion of the townspeople, and what were the refugees who took refuge in Breslau from the surrounding villages.

On January 20, Catholic organizations took care of the problem of evacuating the elderly and the sick. They, like the evangelists, chose to rely on their own strength. By joint efforts on the autobahn, it was possible to evacuate one of the mother houses that were part of Betanina in time. Deaconess Clara Altman alone (!) was able to organize the transportation of one of these houses. A little later, the Jacobhaus, an evangelical nursing home located in the block near the Oder Gates, was evacuated. While the deaconesses were considering whether to stay in Breslau themselves or not, on January 25, the order of the city administration for the life of the city appeared:

"Betanin with all the doctors and nurses remains in Breslau!"

Even those girls who were just preparing to become sisters of mercy had to stay. And the teams of sisters who were already active received specific instructions and orders. The internist, Prof. Stahl and Dr. Kriebel, remained as doctors at Betanina. On January 26, they managed to take away more than a hundred patients from the Elim and Nottebohm houses from Breslau from the Freiburg station. In this case, their acquaintance with the transport official Dubil came in handy.

On January 26, representatives of the Evangelical and Catholic communities met in the building of the new headquarters with the commandant of the fortress, Major General Krause. Church leaders talked about the fact that the military leadership (along with the party leadership) should have been responsible for the lives of the civilian population. They demanded that the major general give his word that the churches should continue their service, and the clergy should certainly remain in

20 The Polish name is Sobotki.

21 The Polish name is Swidnica.

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fortresses. But even this conversation was not safe for the priests. As Ernst Hornig wrote in his memoirs:

"For all that, we had to reckon with the anti-clerical position of the party structures, primarily the secret state police, which constantly caused inconvenience to the church and its ministers."

It is possible that it was for this reason that the clergy turned to the military command. Army officials did not like the Gestapo. The commandant of the fortress, despite being extremely busy (he had to urgently organize defense on the southeastern borders of the city), received the church leaders very kindly. He asked if they wanted to stay to help in the defense or to help the population remaining in the city? Professor Herbert Preisker was entrusted with answering this tricky question, who was just authorized to maintain contact between church structures and the Wehrmacht, including overseeing the care of the wounded in infirmaries and hospitals. He explained that in order to carry out his duties, he needed the help of his colleagues. After that, discussion began on the specific details of the participation of clergy in the activities of military hospitals. Despite the situation, Commandant Krause was very optimistic about the city's defense capabilities. He was even almost not worried about the fact that Soviet troops could go to the rear and surround Breslau. There was some logic in this, because all the last days the battles between the Germans and the Red Army were mainly east of the Silesian capital. After it was decided that the priests would be allowed to stay in the city, they preferred to return to their communities. Almost immediately they all delivered a short sermon. It said that church life continues even in new, changed conditions. In confirmation of this, service schedules were posted on all Breslau temple doors.

When the Gauleiter loudly announced: "Our capital has been declared a fortress!" Almost all the men of Lower Silesia between the ages of 16 and 60 were drafted into the ranks of the Volkssturm. The hasty bringing of the fortress garrison of Breslau to a state of combat readiness turned into the fact that on January 17 all city reservists were put under arms. In addition, special patrols were constantly on duty at railway stations and highways, which should send all men to assembly points, regardless of their military rank and age. The gathering of the militias was held in the local cuirassier barracks. The command of them was entrusted to the reserve major Count Seydlitz. Later, it was he who would become the commander of the entire Volkssturm Breslau. On top of that, the command of the 8th military district sent to the city all the military personnel who were trained at the Frankenstein non-commissioned officer school.

From all these units, four regimental groups were formed:

- A - consisted mainly of soldiers of the non-commissioned officer school Frankenstein;
- C - was composed of reserve parts of Karlovits and Rosetal;
- O - was made up of reserve units of the Waffen-SS Dt. Lissa (German Lissa);

- E - was assembled from the ground units of the Luftwaffe.

The formation of Regimental Group B ("Mora Regiment") was completed only in February 1945.

All these regimental groups were immediately sent to the front line. Regimental Group C was stationed east of the Oder and occupied positions up to the mouth of the Vaida River, where it flowed into the Oder. Regimental Group O occupied positions upstream the Oder in a northwestern direction up to Auras. Regimental Group A was stationed on the left bank of the Oder, southeast of Breslau. Group E was in operational reserve. The Volkssturm battalions were equally subordinate to the command of all these regimental groups. Soon, the forces of the Breslau defenders were replenished with a special motorized officer reconnaissance group, whose tasks included the destruction of numerous bridges across the Oder. A little later, she was involved in the construction of anti-tank structures.

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Despite many shortcomings, the command of the Breslau fortress succeeded in the most important thing - a barrier was created that would not allow Soviet waxes to instantly penetrate the city.

German intelligence reported that Soviet troops, with massive tank support, were advancing on a wide front. The 269th (Hamburg) division, commanded by Lieutenant General Wagner, was entrusted with stopping the advance of the advanced units of the Red Army. This battle-tested formation was withdrawn from Alsace immediately after the start of the Soviet winter offensive and transferred to the command of the 4th Panzer Army. For a whole week (January 21-28, 1945), the division retreated along the Wartenberg-Jols-Breslau line. It was not possible to detain the Soviet troops. In order not to get involved in protracted battles, units of the Red Army along the banks of the Oder bypassed Breslau from two sides. Here, the Red Army did not meet serious resistance, and the frozen Oder allowed the active use of tanks. Despite the fact that the Germans took care in advance to destroy most of the bridges across the river, on January 26, the Red Army units were able to reach the village of Merzdorf, which was located on the way to Olau (the western bank of the Oder). On the left flank, the offensive was not so fast, there were not so strong Soviet units, and therefore they managed to create a bridgehead near Peiskerwitz only by January 29. The capture of the village by the Soviet troops of Merzdorf could have very sad consequences for the Germans - from there it was possible to launch an offensive on the western bank of the Oder. For this reason, already on January 26, 1945, the commandant of the fortress makes a risky decision to throw all available forces - a dozen old tanks and four companies of Luftwaffe junkers - under this village. She had to be beaten off at all costs. The Germans were able to cope with this task. But in any case, this small German tactical success did not eliminate the entire threat looming over Breslau. If earlier the forward detachments of the Red Army were operating in the vicinity of Breslau, now the main forces were gradually being brought up. As a result, the command of the 4th German Panzer Army decides to send reinforcements to this sector of the front. The 269th division was sent to eliminate the Soviet breakthrough near Olau. On January 28-29, she was transferred almost by public transport. During the ensuing battles, the Germans managed to push the Soviet troops back from Olau. At the same time, the forces of a company of Junkers from the SS school launched a counterattack near Treschen (it was located closer to Breslau). This operation was commanded by Captain Seifert. During the counterattack, even one of the German nurses distinguished herself - she became the first Breslau woman to be awarded the Iron Cross.

The advanced groups of the Red Army managed to seriously gain a foothold only in the village of Wasserborn. The Soviet rifle company, dug in near the massive village houses, did not leave its positions, despite all the efforts of the Germans. To keep this small bridgehead, the Red Army had to go on the defensive. They used weapons only to repel another German attack.

Having moved from the northern front to the southern, the 269th division left several of its units with the regimental group C, including the training jaeger battalion, commanded by Major Tenschert. On January 18, this battalion was still in the place of its formation, and a day later it was transferred by rail to the Wartenberg region, where it took on the blow of the Soviet troops.

Let's look back a little. On the eve of the New Year 1945 offensive, the 269th division fought fierce battles near Olau, where units of the Red Army tried to create a foothold for launching a further offensive. During these battles, a funny story happened to the commander of the 269th division, Lieutenant General Wagner, which requires a separate description. On January 21, at Wartenberg Castle, he met with its owners, Prince Biron of Courland and his wife Princess Herzelaide, granddaughter of Kaiser Wilhelm P. Wagner recommended that they leave the castle as quickly as possible. Wishing to help the aristocrats, he even intended to take out of the castle a unique collection of glass and porcelain items, which was a wedding gift from the crowned grandfather. But due to lack of time, she had to leave. For several days, the prince and princess spent in Yeolsa. There, the general more than once had to take care of the luggage of noble refugees.

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There was also another story. Field Marshal Kleist, who was retired, lived on his estate Weideburke (literally - "bridge over the Waida River"). General Krause cost considerable efforts to convince the middle-aged field marshal to leave his estate. It happened literally on the eve of how those places were occupied by Soviet troops. However, later Kleist was extradited by the British to Yugoslavia, from where he was expelled to the Soviet Union. In the USSR, Kleist was sentenced to 25 years in the camps.

If we talk about the strategic initiative of the Germans, then the commandant of the fortress made an unsuccessful attempt to lower the Glazer Neisse reservoir, located 70 kilometers in a straight line south of Breslau. By this measure, he planned to sharply raise the water level in the Oder, which was supposed to break the strong ice of the river, along which Soviet troops and equipment were transported.

The desperation of Breslau's situation is evidenced even by the fact that about a hundred field howitzers of the 1918 model were urgently removed from Markstadt from the Borsig enterprise. The rest were blown up.

On January 31, 1945, General Krause fell ill with pneumonia. The disease turned out to be so severe that it was decided to temporarily transfer the command of Breslau to Colonel-General Schörner, commander of Army Group Center. He decided to appoint General von Alphen as the new commandant. On February 6, 1945, General Krause was taken out of Breslau and sent to a hospital for pulmonary patients, which was located in the Giant Mountains.

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Chapter 3

Major General Alphen received his rank on 30 January 1944. However, he learned about this only on February 12. Before becoming commandant of Breslau, Alphen was the commander of the barrage units of Army Group A, who had the task of covering the Vistula on the left flank of the 4th German Panzer Army. All such efforts were in vain. At noon on January 15, units of the army received an order to leave their positions along the Vistula, as the Soviet tank units broke far to the West. During their retreat, the barrage units of Army Group A were surrounded on three sides by units of the Red Army.

After night marches, during which the Germans tried to evade battles with the Soviet troops, on January 18, units under the command of Alphen were able to unite with the remnants of the 4th

tank army in the Kilze area. At that time, the army, commanded by the General of the Armored Forces Nering, was reinforced by the XXII Panzer Corps. To avoid falling into the boiler, the German tanks were forced to constantly retreat.

While, after a 14-day continuous retreat from Glogau, on the night of January 28-29, 1945, barrage units took up new positions near the Neuhammer training ground, Alphen received an order to retreat to Lengitz. Once there on 31 January, Alphen learned that he had been appointed commandant of Breslau. At first, only the general himself was supposed to be sent to the fortress. His staff officer (1a), Major Albrecht Otto, was to remain in the former unit. But the perseverance of Otto himself, who had come a long way from the commander of a sapper company formed in 1934 in Neu-Ulm, was able to change the opinion of the command of the army group. The fact that both von Alphen and Otto began their military careers in engineer units proved to be very useful for the defense of Breslau in the future.

After a short discussion of actions, on February 1, 1945, von Alphen and Otto were sent by plane to Breslau. The city with its busy traffic, despite the presence of many barricades, little resembled a fortress. Above, we listed everything that the "fortress" should have had. After a short report by Captain Erdmann and Major Böck, whom Alphen knew from his time in the Reichswehr and the Norwegian campaign, it became clear that since the beginning of January, the chief of staff of the 8th military district, Major General Losberg, had actually been in command here. The appearance of von Alphen was supposed to free him from unnecessary duties. Von Alphen himself saw that urgent action had to be taken.

Taking into account the fact that the Soviet troops were already in front of the gates of Breslau, it was necessary to quickly resolve all organizational issues. All were unanimously of the opinion that the defense of Breslau largely depended on this. A prerequisite for the tactical success of the Germans was to be the coordination of the actions of various structures. At that time, each of them had their own task, which in some cases did not take into account the general situation. All parts of the Wehrmacht, all civilian structures, all industrial enterprises and, if possible, most of the civilian population had to be involved in the defense of the fortress. This is where Major Otto proved to be indispensable! He immediately became the head of the operations department of the fortress headquarters. Otto himself, with considerable surprise, discovered that before February 1, no one even tried to coordinate actions.

It is now difficult to establish in precise detail how this coordination proceeded. In any case, it is clear that the forces of the division headquarters were clearly not enough to carry out such a difficult task. Like his predecessor, von Alphen tried to get permission to expand the command post at least to the level of the headquarters of the corps. But once again, everything was in vain, although the 50 thousand soldiers under his command, including parts of the Volkssturm, and 80 thousand civilians connected to the defense of the city (information was provided by the local NSDAP kraisleiter on February 14, 1945) made it possible to count on the structure of the corps headquarters, with all the ensuing consequences. It should immediately be noted that throughout the battles for Breslau, Colonel Tizler of the reserve provided invaluable assistance to the German headquarters. He was a native of Silesia. At one time he commanded the 38th Jaeger Regiment. He could not only keep young soldiers and Volkssturmmen from panic, but also give good advice to Alphen. In the end, there was nothing surprising in the fact that Tizler was made the personal representative of the commandant of the fortress.

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Many of the participants in those events recalled after the war that for them the battles for Breslau would have been unthinkable without "daddy Tizler."

Major Pöhl, who shortly before February 1st was appointed staff officer in charge of supplies, was sent to study at the military academy, to the great regret of von Alphen. Pöhl left the city on February 15, that is, literally on the eve of how Breslau was completely

surrounded. Prior to the appointment of Major Fuchs as Quartermaster, several precious days had been lost. More successful for the Germans was the formation of communications and warning units. In addition, in early February, Colonel Urbatis appeared in the fortress. He was personally summoned by von Alphen of Schwednitz. Breslau was in immediate need of a competent artillery commander, and Urbatis was a perfect fit for the role.

In early January, numerous mobilized sappers prepared for the destruction of 40 Breslau bridges, including those across the Oder and tributaries of the Oder. But due to their lack of a commander, they did not receive any more tasks until February. Von Alphen had to personally contact the personnel department of the ground forces command by telephone. Only then did Major Hameister arrive in Breslau in mid-February. He was appointed commander of the Breslau sapper regiment.

In early February, Breslau received another reinforcement. It was a company of the 6th technical battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Schulze, an engineer by training. The company was well equipped, well supplied and fully motorized. This unit was involved in Breslau's life support, which will be discussed later. To reinforce the sapper units of the fortress, at about the same time, two echelons of remote-controlled Goliath tankettes arrived by rail from the Königsbrück training ground. In each echelon, in addition to 48 Goliaths, 60 personnel arrived. By itself, the Goliath was a miniature caterpillar tankette that could carry from 50 to 75 kilograms of explosives. These "all-terrain torpedoes" were controlled through a special cable.

If we talk about the infantry units, including the Volkssturm, then their condition could hardly be called even satisfactory. For the most part, they consisted of reservists, as well as civilians who, without even going through the slightest training, were urgently mobilized. From this huge crowd of people who, with the exception of the reservists, were not even familiar with the basics of military affairs, combat-ready infantry regiments were to be formed. The task for the Germans was somewhat facilitated by the fact that each of the infantrymen had to defend his small homeland. In early February, the army command sent several staff officers who were to form ordinary infantry regiments from regimental groups, no longer designated by letters, but by the names of their commanders. All these measures anticipated later events. They made it possible in advance to create conditions for making up for the huge losses that the Germans first encountered in the winter of 1941-1942. Then a way out of the situation was found in the use of the so-called "vacation battalions". The 609th division of General Ruff was formed in a similar way, which at first was called the Breslau Corps Group. It began to be created in early February on the southern sector of the front near Breslau. She received most of the soldiers needed for replenishment from the fortress, as well as regimental commanders: Reinkober, Kersten and Schulz. The headquarters of this division was organized in January 1945 in Dresden, but in February he moved to Breslau. Of the people called up in Breslau, it was constantly necessary to replenish the composition of not only the 609th, but also the 269th Infantry Division mentioned above, as well as other formations that fought outside the fortress. Every formation, every regiment was in constant need of soldiers.

It cannot be said that the constant replenishment of the units that fought outside Breslau crossed out all the plans of the command of the garrison of the fortress. No matter how, organizational measures began to be carried out systematically only after the complete encirclement of the city. Major Count Seydlitz was engaged in the preparation of the mobilized residents, and Oberleutnant Richter, who served in the headquarters, took care of all organizational issues.

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After the entry of Soviet troops into Silesia, retreating units of the Volkssturm began to arrive in Breslau. They were even worse prepared than the Volkssturmmists of the fortress. But the defense of the city was unthinkable without their participation. Wehrmacht officers needed to correct as quickly as possible all the omissions that had been made after the creation

Volkssturm in autumn 1944. The main blame for the poor preparation of the Volkssturm (not only in Breslau, but throughout Germany) was shifted by military officials after the war onto the shoulders of the National Socialist legislators who passed the Volkssturm law. Alfén himself wrote:

"The creation of the people's militia was a very responsible task that required special study. But they didn't take it seriously."

The preparation and training of the Volkssturmists in early February 1945 was entrusted to SA Obergruppenführer Herzog and his subordinates. Hergotz himself was a seasoned soldier. As a reserve officer, he took part in the Western Campaign of 1940. It was thanks to him that the amorphous mass of the German people's militias began to resemble the likeness of military units. He divided the entire Volkssturm into combat battalions, at the head of which he tried to place either reserve officers or people who had combat experience. He appointed acting officers of the Wehrmacht as commanders of the working battalions and two battalions formed from members of the Hitler Youth. Many emphasized that he did the right thing from a tactical point of view when he formed separate units from teenagers, without mixing them with adult militias.

As mentioned above, such an active reorganization of the fortress garrison was preceded by a number of mistakes and miscalculations. As a result, most of Breslau's defenders were not only poorly, but terribly armed. The vast majority of Volkssturmists received captured rifles of various manufactures, from Soviet to French. No more than 10 rounds of ammunition were attached to each of the rifles. They had no uniform, not even decent shoes. As a result, it is not surprising that during the fighting at the end of January, the 44th (Klugrer) and 46th (Peshke) battalions of Regimental Group A suffered huge losses. The largest number of victims was during the battle, which went on both sides of the so-called "big" railway bridge, when the Germans tried to stop the advanced Soviet units crossing the Oder.

The 55th (Seifert) and 56th (Lindenschmidt) battalions of the Hitler Youth created energetic and competent commanders and non-commissioned officers who trained teenagers. With the exception of the 41st Battalion (Klose), the units from the Hitler Youth were the only exception to the rule. They were well equipped and armed. Almost all of the above battalions were armed with a Mauser 98 rifle and light machine guns MG 08/15 ("Maxim"). If we talk about the 41st battalion, it is striking that he began training in the fall of 1944. Being fully staffed by commanders and junior commanders, his personnel began exercises on the ground. The left bank of the Oder, just below Breslau, was chosen as a place of potential defense. By the way, it was on this sector that the 41st battalion had to fight in the last days of January 1945.

What tasks did the combat situation that developed by February 1, 1945 imply? By and large, there were three of them: strengthening the northern sector of the front, pushing the Soviet troops back from Wasserborn, and securing on the bridgehead near Peiskerwitz.

Mora's newly formed regiment was sent north. He received several 88 mm anti-aircraft guns as reinforcements. This decision was made by the commander of the artillery group, Major Hartl. In addition, sappers began to create minefields and special barriers in front of the positions of the regiment.

On the night of February 2-3, a company of sappers, commanded by Captain Ebergardt Seifert, liquidated the Soviet bridgehead in Wasserborn, or, as the Germans called it, the "hornet's nest." During this operation, sappers actively used flamethrowers. During the night offensive, the commander of one of the platoons was killed. It is significant that Captain Seifert, despite the danger of falling under the tribunal, categorically refused to attack Wasserborn.

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forces of two companies of "vacationers", as he was ordered by the command of the Breslau corps group.

The third task - the elimination of the Soviet foothold in Peiskerwitz - was carried out on February 8, 1945 by the forces of the most powerful military unit located in the fortress. It was the SS regiment of Besslein. The German attacks preceding this operation had completely failed. Only by combining the offensive with massive fire artillery support, the Germans managed to recapture Peiskerwitz from the Red Army. In artillery preparation, the following forces were taken:

- 12 light field howitzers;
- 8 88 mm anti-aircraft guns;
- 6 heavy infantry guns;
- 12 light infantry guns;
- 16 120mm heavy mortars.

Total - 54 guns and mortars.

In addition, two German artillery batteries fired on Soviet positions from the flanks and partly from the rear.

The liquidation of this tiny Soviet bridgehead, which hardly exceeded 2 square kilometers in area, may seem to the modern reader a secondary and insignificant operation against the backdrop of subsequent fierce fighting. Even the use by the Germans of several dozen guns can hardly impress. One might even ask why this tiny section of the front was given such great importance? There were several reasons for this. In addition to tactical, this operation was of great psychological importance. The Germans very urgently needed a successful offensive operation, not associated with large losses of their own forces.

The combined arms unit itself, which was the Breslau fortress, was not only new, but also largely "improvised". Parts did not know their commanders. For this reason, the German success at Peiskerwitz was something of a symbolic event. Without him, it was very difficult not only for the Besslein regiment, but also for all the Germans defending in Breslau to continue the fight. In addition to the SS men themselves, the 41st (Klose) and 42nd (Stefan) Volkssturm battalions, which were included in this shelf.

After these operations, the attention of the garrison headquarters was again riveted to Breslau, or rather, to its arrangement. First of all, this applied to chaotically erected barricades. Their location and formation was not always correct both from a tactical and technical point of view. Major General Alphen recalled after the war:

"In the very first days of February, we discovered that these labyrinths of barricades not only helped us, but harmed us, as they prevented the operational transfer of forces and interfered with the work of our signalmen."

Under the leadership of sappers, the Volkssturmists began to put the barricade system in order. At that time, the sapper units in Breslau did not have a single command. As a result, it was decided that the most experienced sappers would be exclusively engaged in mining bridges, while the rest were assigned to less significant tasks. In total, there were 66 bridges in Breslau and its environs: 40 bridges over the Oder, its tributaries and over canals, 16 overpass bridges west and south of the city, and 10 overpass bridges near the Breslau main station. By the beginning of February, all 40 bridges across the river were ready to be blown up. But their explosion was temporarily delayed, since even

units of the Red Army advancing from the north were fighting 12 kilometers from the city center. In addition, the strictest ban on the "cautious" destruction of bridges and crossings came to Breslau. It was possible to blow them up only if there was an immediate threat of capture by Soviet troops. In all other cases, such actions required a separate permission from the command. The mined bridges themselves became a place of increased danger. They could be dangerous for four different reasons:

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- it was possible that the fuses went off unintentionally;
- the system for the implementation of the explosion could suffer from the weather or the actions of Soviet intelligence officers, which could lead to the safety of the bridge at a critical moment;
- the explosion could have been prevented or, conversely, provoked by saboteurs and saboteurs;
- the appearance of minor groups of Red Army soldiers, for example, scouts, could lead to the fact that the commanders of special German sapper detachments could blow up bridges on their own initiative.

The implementation of tactical and technical measures to neutralize these dangerous factors was entrusted to the then commander of the sappers, Captain Möller. In a critical situation in late January - early February 1945, he acted very quickly and competently, which, however, required considerable strength from him.

For a more competent use of the forces available in Breslau, in early February, 2/3 of the sappers were withdrawn from the banks of the Oder. They were gradually replaced by specially trained and trained Volkssturmists. As a result, only one sapper battalion was engaged in the problems of bridges, and the two released on February 10 were sent to perform other tasks. Of course, there were incidents on the bridges in the future, but their number, taking into account the number of crossings, was quite insignificant. In addition, none of these incidents led to irreversible consequences. Looking ahead, we can say that in April 1945, some of the bridges of the "inner Oder" were even cleared of mines. In this regard, the question arises: why did the mining of bridges, the destruction of which should have occurred only in an exceptional case, take so much time and effort? The German command did not rule out that Soviet troops could enter the city from the north. If in this situation the bridges had not been destroyed, then the German group would have found itself in a very difficult situation. And by February 12, the development of events in the southern sector of the front was so unfavorable for the Germans that most of them were forced to reckon with the possibility of an early encirclement of Breslau.

The management of the military forces in Breslau was strange to say the least. On the one hand, there was a commandant of the fortress, but on the other hand, Breslau was subordinate to the commander of the 8th military district, who was also formally the commander of the Breslau Corps Group. At the same time, the units and formations that fought on the southern sector of the front did not obey him, but only the 609th division, which was replenished exclusively at the expense of the inhabitants of Breslau. The 296th Infantry Division, which bordered on its right flank, which had been near Olau since the end of January, was formally part of the 18th Corps.

From the beginning of February, Soviet troops managed to seize new bridgeheads almost daily. In the period from February 1 to February 9, 1945, units of the Red Army managed to gain a foothold near Brig, Olau, Malch, Steinau and Boibus. It became obvious to the German command that the Soviet troops planned to pincer the city from the south and north, close the encirclement, after which it was possible to attack the main German forces located much south of Breslau.

If until January 31 the 269th division managed to more or less successfully repel Soviet attacks near Olau, then from February 2 the picture began to change not in favor of the Germans. Despite the desperate resistance, the position of the 269th division and the 609th division located somewhat to the east could hardly be called reliable. Taking into account the peculiarities of the line of defense, the Soviet troops, with multiple superiority, gradually bypassed the positions of the 269th division from the western flank. Its commander, who did not have an order to retreat from the divisions back to Breslau, made the right decision in the current situation when, on the night of February 11-12, 1945, he led the entire divisional artillery and vehicles. A couple of days later, on the night of February 13-14, a breakthrough of the division's combat units followed the same path. Not all divisional units managed to escape from the encirclement. Those who could not get out of the ring were forced to retreat to Breslau - from now on they became part of the fortress garrison, which was a very valuable replenishment for the commandant. The commander of the 269th division, Lieutenant General Wagner, who is not

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managed to escape from the encirclement, on the night of February 15-16, together with the headquarters of the Breslau corps group, he was taken by plane to the south, where he joined his division. Later, this formation, which had avoided falling into the boiler, was transferred to the northern sector of the front, from where it repeatedly tried to release Breslau. The fortress of Breslau itself owed a great deal to the 269th division. Most importantly, she was able to buy time. In late January and early February, Breslau was still too weak to withstand a siege.

Before returning to Breslau itself, at least a few words must be said about one more German military formation, which performed a similar function to the 269th division. It was General Sachsenheimer's 17th Infantry Division. With fierce fighting, she retreated from the Vistula in the Pulawy area in the direction of Malch - Neumarkt. The fighting of this division, in fact, for two weeks was able to slow down the detour of Breslau by the Soviet troops from the west. That is, the blockade of the fortress from the main German forces was delayed for almost 15 weeks.

In addition, before the start of its redeployment to the southern sector of the front, several units were transferred from the division to Breslau, which again strengthened the garrison of the fortress. But the emergence of new military units did not solve the problem with ammunition. Where, in the current situation, was ammunition supposed to arrive in Breslau? The gain in time and the conduct of fierce defensive battles inevitably led to a deterioration in the situation with ammunition. Their supplies were so insignificant that there could be no question of a proper "supply of the fortress." However, the slowdown of the Soviet offensive, which lasted almost a month (January 17-February 14), was used in order to reach the agreement in principle of the army command to supply Breslau through the "air bridge".

The situation in Breslau changed fundamentally after 14 February. Now the city could only rely on its own forces. On the northern sector of the front, the Mora and Sauer regiments tried to repel the attacks of the Red Army units. Basically, they attacked with forces not exceeding the size of a rifle battalion, which made it possible to hold their positions. Mohr's energy as a new regiment commander made it possible to liquidate not only the notorious "hornet's nest", but also the "evening settlement", as the place was called, located between Zakrau and Hundsfield, where several companies of Red Army soldiers were entrenched. In addition, Mora's regiment in one case was even able to launch a counteroffensive, during which the Tenshert battalion won a 3-kilometer section from the Soviet troops. In many ways, these sorties were able to temporarily stop the Soviet offensive that was developing on this sector of the front. These actions made it much easier for the Germans to create defensive lines. The use of 88-mm anti-aircraft guns, as well as the construction of anti-tank installations, made it possible for some time to stabilize the situation on the northern sector of the front. Now here the Germans could also repel more powerful Soviet attacks. But all these measures did not allow the German intelligence officers to find out the situation around Breslau. She barely changed.

or not every hour. For the commandant of the fortress, one thing was clear - the Soviet troops were concentrating their forces south of the city. Meanwhile, in the period from 12 to 14 February, units of the Red Army, bypassing Breslau from the west and east, began to unite south of the fortress. Until February 15, there were still some "holes" in the emerging encirclement (for example, near Kant), which allowed the functioning of a large railway line leading to Waldenburg.

If we talk about the Soviet units surrounding Breslau, then from the west (German Lissa) there was one Soviet division, from the south-west (Kant) - also one division, from the south a more powerful grouping consisting of 4 divisions was approaching Breslau. Before discussing the prospects for a Soviet offensive, let's turn our attention to the German units located to the west and southwest of Breslau. The Wehl Regiment (formerly Regimental Group E) was formed from Luftwaffe ground units, mostly service personnel. Most of them, before the start of the Soviet offensive, were located in Schöngarten, which lay southwest of Breslau. Due to the heterogeneity of this regiment, the choice of the place of its use was not immediately determined. Compared to other regiments, this infantry formation was not the most prepared, which predetermined the essence of its first combat mission. He was sent to

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section of the Weistritz-Strygauer front. It was from here that on the night of February 11-12, the movement of Soviet troops was reported by telephone. In order to take up more fortified positions, on the night of February 13-14, the regiment was withdrawn closer to the general line of defense to the Hermannsdorf-Klettendorf section, thanks to which it avoided accepting a battle with well-armed units of the Red Army. On the left wing of the still not fully formed regiment, German artillerymen and sappers helped him. The light field howitzer unit, newly formed by the new artillery commander, commanded by Captain Kübel, was able to stop the advance of the Red Army along the highway near Bettlern. At the same time, in this sector of the front, Soviet troops were attacked by German sappers. Near the highway just south of Klettendorf, with the help of the Goliaths, they not only destroyed the overpass, but also managed to undermine six Soviet anti-tank guns. It was in Klettendorf that Wel's regiment was included in the 609th division, whose positions passed from this place south to Herzogshufen, to Brokau, and ended on the banks of the Oder. To the right of Vel, on both sides of Hermannsdorf, the positions were held by a regiment commanded by Colonel Göllnitz. The regiment would later bear the name Hanfa. In addition, on the night of February 13-14, Besslein's regiment was advanced to the "Oder Front" to Weistritz. At that moment, the German Lissa garrison could already observe the approaching Soviet units.

Under Soviet pressure, the German regiments were forced to constantly perform tactical actions, which basically boiled down to very complex night regroupings. But at the same time, the main front line remained essentially unchanged. However, already from February 14, it was possible to say that the encirclement ring was closed, and a united front of struggle was formed.

Given the level of training of the regiments, the number of weapons, as well as the distance from the crossings over the Oder, the front around Breslau did not look like an ideal defensive structure. The front line was somewhere at a distance of 9-10 kilometers from the city center. With a total front length of 72 kilometers, it was generally held by 8 infantry regiments (5 "independent" and 3 from the 609th division), that is, each regiment accounted for an average of 9 kilometers of front line. In addition, the front itself was too close to the city center. Already at the beginning of February it was clear that Breslau's situation called for decisive action. The most important decision taken between February 12 and 14 was the intention to narrow the defense ring, which was supposed to prevent the breakthrough of the front line and the penetration of Soviet troops into the territory of Breslau itself. It was also extremely clear that the success of the defense of Breslau largely depended on the possibility of the existence of a "corridor" that would connect the city with the main German troops located to the south. But, despite the possibility of narrowing the ring of defense, it was imperative to hold the Gandau airport to the last. To the great regret of the commandant of the fortress, during the fighting, take-off

the strips of the airfield were badly damaged, ceasing to meet the requirements that were imposed on such structures in the Luftwaffe.

Before we return to the position of Breslau and the fierce fighting that began on February 15, 1945, we will pay attention to some units of different branches of the military. The timely withdrawal of military sappers from the bridges over the Oder made it possible to create several operational teams that were supposed to prepare numerous overpasses located in the western and southern suburbs of Breslau for destruction. To the great regret of the Germans, these teams had to destroy the bridges across the Weistritz, the left tributary of the Oder. Not a single crossing remained on the section from German Lissa to Kant. However, this allowed the Germans to gain time. If they had not blown up these bridges, the Soviet troops would have been under the walls of Breslau already in February 1945.

During the retreat of the 269th and 17th German divisions, not all of their units were able to avoid encirclement. As a result, several units and a certain amount of weapons ended up in Breslau. Found in the city:

- non-commissioned officer school Striegau, whose composition at that moment was commanded by Captain Sommer;
- a battalion of the Fanenjunks of the Gnesen military school;
- training and reconnaissance unit 8 from Yolsa under the command of a captain

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Hanfa;

- six 75-mm assault guns (German self-propelled artillery mounts) from the 311th assault gun brigade;
- one unit (three batteries) of heavy 150-mm field howitzers, commanded by Captain Girardet;
- one battery (two barrels) of 210-mm mortars, for which there was only 50 rounds of ammunition;
- part of the 269th engineer battalion;
- numerous vehicles of the 17th division.

Assault guns were immediately included in the Breslau Tank Destroyer Unit, which was constantly used in combat operations. By and large, they became its core. Oberleutnant Retter, who was subordinate to the temporary quartermaster, Major Pöl, was instructed to "comb" all the warehouses and railway stations located in the city and the district. He intended to find damaged or unrepaired tanks. But the result of the audit was the discovery of about a hundred "offeriores" ("chimneys" - early modifications of the Panzerschrek anti-tank rocket launcher) with approximately 6 thousand charges for them. As a result, by February 20, 1945, the "Tank Destroyer Unit" became an important reserve in the defense of the fortress.

One of the commanders of the "Tank Destroyer Unit", assault gun artilleryman Hartman (in April 1945 he will be promoted to the rank of lieutenant), recalled the beginning of this work:

"The first three days in the Breslau fortress I spent in a bunker where a military hospital was located. I wasn't hurt. I ended up in the hospital on the morning of February 16, 1945 due to complete exhaustion. With the ten assault guns of the 269th Infantry Division at its disposal,

During February 12-13, we tried to repel the Russian offensive south of Breslau, which they launched from the bridgeheads at Brig and Steinau. All attacks were repulsed. A little south of the position of our battle group, the Russians managed to break through the front line, after which Breslau was surrounded, and we were cut off from our part. On the night of February 13-14, we tried to break out of the encirclement. But the village of Gallen, through which our path lay, turned out to be literally stuffed with anti-tank guns and Russian mortars. Also found there a significant number of tanks. An attempt to break through the enemy defenses was unsuccessful. At dawn, I was forced to return to my original positions with my assault gun. We moved past our burnt cars. We gathered together at the Schönwasser estate. The surviving six assault guns from our 311th brigade were forced to head to Breslau. Everyone could try to break out of the encirclement on foot. I don't know if they succeeded, but I didn't. I crossed over a thin crust of ice and lay soaked all day south of Herzogshufen between our and Russian positions, on the night of February 15-16, on the way to Brokau, I ran into several Volkssturmists, who immediately sent me to the hospital. Three days later I recovered and was already on my feet. I still can't wrap my head around how I managed not to get pneumonia or something like that. During these three days I had plenty of time to think about the situation. For the first time in the entire war, I felt scared. I ended up in a Russian environment. There were all sorts of rumors. Everyone wanted to believe that we would be released. No one considered it possible that the city could be held for more than three weeks. On the third day of treatment, I was able to walk on my own. At that time, an outside observer would hardly have formed the opinion that we lived in a besieged city. There were even trams running through the streets. On each corner were pasted red sheets with orders from the commandant of the fortress. Every night Russian searchlights scanned the sky, and their anti-aircraft artillery, whose fire resembled pearl necklaces from a distance, hunted our planes. I arrived at the unit to which the assault guns of my brigade were handed over. The formation of a tank company "Breslau Tank Destroyer Unit" began. It consisted of two platoons of assault guns, one platoon with six light tanks and one platoon equipped with self-propelled guns.

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carriages. The self-propelled guns, which never exceeded six, had 75 mm guns, while the tanks had 20 mm guns. The company commander, Oberleutnant Fentske commanded an assault tank of the ŷU model, on which a gun from the Panther was installed. As a uniform for the composition of the company, dark blue, fur-lined flying overalls were used. In what - in what, and in clothes there was clearly no shortage. The composition of the company was very diverse: crews of assault guns, tankers, people from anti-tank units, artillerymen. However, this did not prevent us from becoming a well-coordinated military unit in the shortest possible time.

If we talk about artillery units, then the following followed from the "Battle order and location of artillery batteries". The artillery group "North" was assigned to the regiments of Mohr and Sauer. Artillery group "West" supported the Besslein and Hanf regiments with fire from the Gandau area. The artillery group "Southwest" consisted of howitzers commanded by Ghirardet. They were supposed to cover the southwestern flank of Vel's regiment. In addition, a separate artillery regiment was allocated from the 609th division, which consisted of three incomplete battalions, commanded by Major Siebert. In general, these 32 artillery batteries, together with the anti-aircraft artillery regiment, which directly subordinated to the commander of the fortress artillery Urbatis, totaled about 200 barrels. Under conditions of a normal supply of ammunition, German artillery could become a serious obstacle to the Soviet offensive.

The only thing that Commandant Breslau did not experience any problems with was food - it was almost in abundance. This was by no means due to the fact that after Breslau was declared a fortress, special reserves began to be created in it. The fact is that over the course of several years, Silesia, as a "German bomb shelter", became an area in which

many warehouses were built. As a result, this German region could be called a kind of "imperial pantry". If we talk about the level of supplies available in Breslau, then we can name such figures as 5 million chicken eggs and 150 thousand frozen rabbit carcasses; This does not include other foodstuffs. Such huge reserves were not only available in the besieged fortress, but thanks to the efforts of the deputy burgomaster Städtler and Albert Stosch, they were stored in almost ideal conditions. The population of Breslau must have been grateful to these two people that during the siege they had not only enough food, but even alcoholic drinks and cigarettes. Looking ahead, I will say that Stedtler died during one of the air raids.

General Alphen, who had gained some experience in the defense of large cities, decided in advance to take care of Breslau's sewers. To do this, he brought in Dr. Liebig, city councilor for construction. He was given two tasks. Firstly, with the likely deployment of the Soviet offensive from the south, it was necessary to prevent the penetration of the forward detachments of the Red Army into the territory of Breslau through the sewer networks. Otherwise, Soviet soldiers could almost unhindered find themselves almost in the very heart of the fortress. Secondly, it was necessary to quickly find out how much the sewerage was flooded in the area located north of the Oder meadows. If these sewer networks were not flooded, but there was a similar possibility, then this could be an advantageous moment in strengthening the defense of the "northern" front, at least saving the forces at the disposal of the Germans. Advisor Liebig was able to quite successfully cope with the tasks assigned to him, which we will discuss separately. However, none of the Breslau command expected that the Ole spill would lead to the emergence of a real lake. But with the use of special hydraulic engineering, it was still possible to flood the meadows, which had significant lowlands and ravines. Such a swamp could hardly completely stop the advance of the Red Army, but in any case it could become a natural barrier for the Volkssturm units that were well versed in the terrain.

If we talk about the sanitary units, then they were under the command of the senior field doctor Meling. In his memoirs, General Alphen noted:

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"This field of activity was well organized both in terms of the supply of medicines and in terms of the availability of competent staff, which for the most part consisted of doctors from various Breslau clinics. A good supply of medicines gave hope that we would not experience medical problems during defensive battles. Most German hospitals were located in special bunkers.

If we talk about the civilian population, then it should be noted that after February 14, any movement from the city was stopped. All refugees who did not have time to leave the city were placed in the premises of the New Market (Neumarkt) in the south of Breslau. As General Alphen noted:

"80 thousand of the population did not cause any trouble to the command, since there were sufficient food supplies. But such a large number of people created other problems. Quite legitimate, purely human questions arose. For example, which areas of the city should have been evacuated immediately? In February, it was difficult to answer it, as clouds were constantly gathering over Breslau. Everything depended on the general situation on the fronts and how successfully the enemy offensive would develop. If he threatened at first from the north, then the northern regions were evacuated. The civilian population could wait out the fighting in the south of the city."

The military command decided to rid itself of the problems with the evacuation of the civilian population and transferred these tasks into the hands of the party organization of the NSDAP, namely the kreisleiter. In addition, during the siege of the fortress, the Germans found it very useful to cooperate with the FAMO company. This will be the subject of a separate story.

A separate, somewhat symbolic act was the transfer of the command of the fortress from the office premises, which were located on Garbitz Strasse, to well-fortified basements on the Liebig hills, where a command post room was prudently created. Such a move for the Germans turned out to be very timely. When, on the afternoon of February 14, 1945, the operational department of the fortress headquarters informed the commandant that they were ready to begin work in the new conditions, information came that the former headquarters building had been completely destroyed during the Soviet bombardment. "Resettlement" took place, as they say, at the very last moment. If we talk about the new location of the headquarters of the fortress, then it should be noted that they tried to choose the most favorable place for its placement. When choosing it, several factors were taken into account: the possibility of free movement, the convenience of pulling a communication cable, as well as some design features. As a result, one of the spacious basements was chosen, in which artificial lighting could be constantly maintained. Part of this basement had been expanded a few years earlier, since it was here that the Breslau air defense headquarters was supposed to be located. There is nothing surprising in the fact that in 1945 the headquarters of the "Fortress Breslau" was located here. What was the surprise of the officers when one of them began to assert that the ceilings of this bunker-basement were erected without iron reinforcement. Initially, the information was treated skeptically and very incredulously. It was only after the building plans were submitted that this information was found to be correct. With a direct hit by a bomb, the headquarters could collapse like a house of cards. As a result, the sapper battalion of the Volkssturm was urgently called in, which was supposed to strengthen the structure of the building. Basically, for this, cobblestones turned out from the pavement of neighboring streets were used, which at one time were made of Silesian granite. As a result, a new bulk structure appeared above the basement. At the end of February, practice showed that she was able to withstand several bomb hits. Oberleutnant Zeevan was transferred from the Tenschert battalion to the headquarters in time, who did a lot to ensure the life of the command post of the fortress. This officer turned out to be a specialist in the organization of fortress command posts by his education. Subsequently, it was on his initiative that the reserve headquarters of the fortress was prepared, which was located on Sandy Island in the centuries-old cellars of the university library. AND,

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finally, it was Oberleutnant Zeevan who erected a third command post in the eastern regions of the cities, which, however, was never used.

But let us turn to the problems of the ordinary inhabitants of Breslau. At the end of January 1945, it was no secret to anyone that in the near future the Soviet troops were to blockade the city. Therefore, in all areas, the Organization Todt began work on erecting barricades on the streets. But the strength of the organization for the successful fulfillment of the task assigned to it was clearly not enough. For this reason, the civilian population was actively involved in the construction work. Actually, it was difficult to call it construction work, since the main material for the barricades were stones turned out of the pavement. In the erected barricades, only small passages were left, into which a car or a city tram could "squeeze": as a rule, they coincided with the rail tracks.

A feature of the siege of Breslau was the fact that out of the ten tram routes available at that time, three continued their work. And this applied not only to the first days of the siege. So, what were these tram routes? One had the code name "circular railway"; it was also sometimes referred to as the "round route". It connected the station at the Oder Gate, Freiburg Station and the Main Railway Station. Route No. 1 also operated, which ran through Trebnitz Square, went north to the city ring through Hindenburg Square (before that, Kaiser Wilhelm Square), and then went to the southern suburbs. There was also a route that ran from west to east. It started at Gandau Airport in the west and pumped through the central ring at Ofener Straße in the east. But if we delve into the center of Breslau itself, we could find there countless

many new tram routes. This was due to the fact that in the center of Breslau there was a huge number of party, administrative bodies, military enterprises that were evacuated here several years ago. Military hospitals and army departments were also located there. For operational communication between them, trams were launched. In addition, the party leadership believed that with the help of such a technique it could suppress panic among the population: "Trams are running - so there is nothing to be afraid of, everything is not so bad." While the townspeople rode trams, they could still have hope that everything would be fixed. The tram, even in the surrounded city, was a kind of symbol of ordinary, normal life. But strange changes did not hide from many. Trams began to run without conductors, and no one else demanded a fare. However, in early March, a route was launched that traveled from south to north of the city. But already in mid-March, the tram depot was bombed. By April, only a "circular route" operated in the city, along which trams followed from Trebnitzskaya to Royal Square. There was also a small tram line Royal Square - Schlachthof - Frankfurt Street.

The last days of January passed under the sign of active resettlement of the German population from the north to the south of the city. Since the military command considered that the Soviet troops would attack the city from the server, an order was issued to clear all areas on the right bank of the Oder. As a result, thousands of people rushed to the southern suburbs of Breslau in search of housing and food. But even here they did not find peace, since subsequently on February 17, units of the Red Army struck precisely from the south, between Brokau and Klettendorf. The offensive was so strong that the inhabitants were forced to rush back. Such evacuations took place literally one after another. Each of them was given a minimum amount of time. Often the orders looked like a mockery. So, for example, at the end of January, only 20 minutes were allotted for the relocation of the Bethlehem hospital, located on Matthias Strasse! But there were seriously ill people there, who were taken care of by the deaconesses from the Grunberg maternal home. In the same haste, a hospital in the name of All Saints was moved to one of the city hospitals. Before they had time to settle down in a new place, on February 17, patients in the same terrible haste began to be taken away from the southern suburbs to the north. It is not known what the patients suffered more from: from the Soviet offensive or the "concern" of the party authorities.

How hard it was for the civilian population in Breslau can be judged from the memoirs of Ernst Horning. From conversations with priests and parishioners, he learned about the growing number of suicides that occurred in the city. He himself kept

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opinion that it was difficult to establish their exact number. Eyewitness accounts also varied widely. We present two polar assessments. One of them belonged to the priest Paul Peikert. He wrote on March 13 in his diary:

"I learned from a reliable source that between 100 and 120 suicides occur daily in our city."

At the same time, Alfons Buchholz, member of the board of trustees of St. George's Hospital noted:

"After the encirclement of the city by the Russians, voluntary death was not very common. phenomenon."

Hornig's own observations gave some intermediate figure. In his memoirs, he logically noted that no one in Breslau could give "reliable data" at that time. He himself heard about a wave of suicides that began when the front approached Breslau, and then received a new impetus with the start of fighting on the southern outskirts of the city. According to his calculations, about 50 people took their lives every day. If this figure is multiplied by the 84 days of the siege of Breslau,

it turns out that during this time about 4200 people committed suicide. However, exact information about this problem is unlikely to ever be obtained.

On January 28, 1945, the inhabitants of Breslau were horrified to find leaflets signed by Gauleiter Hanke pasted on the streets of their houses. They said:

"The second burgomaster of the city, ministerial adviser Dr. Spielhagen asked the mayor of the capital, Gau Leichtersterne, to contact Berlin in order to be appointed to a new position. His exceptional cowardice prompted him to flee... On my orders, the ministerial adviser Spielhagen was shot by a separate division of the Volkssturm in front of the town hall building. He who fears to die with honor will die in dishonor."

Hugo Ertung, at one time a well-known German writer and screenwriter, wrote in those days in his diary:

"One of our Fanenjunks came to my apartment pale and agitated. He spoke about how he witnessed the execution of Burgomaster Spielhagen, which was a personal initiative of the Gauleiter. I often met Dr. Spielhagen on the tram - we both left very early for work. Once I even had a conversation with this very intelligent man, who did not hesitate to criticize the prevailing order. His terrible end just shocked me."

Another eyewitness recalled:

"The order to shoot Spielhagen was preceded by a long-term conflict with Gauleiter Hanke, whom the economical burgomaster criticized for the pompous festivities that were held in the city. Now the party functionary has received a reason to finally crack down on the burgomaster who criticized him. On the morning of January 28 at 6 a.m., the firing squad aimed their rifles at the burgomaster, who was blindfolded at the foot of the equestrian statue of Friedrich P. There was a command, a volley, and Dr. Spielhagen fell dead. Further, the eyewitness continued: "Then there were many more terrible executions. Over time, they even stopped putting up leaflets announcing them. The day before | February, on the orders of Hanke, the following leaflet appeared: "On January 25, the Head of the Agricultural Department of Lower Silesia, Dr. Sommer, without obtaining the appropriate permission, left his post in Breslau without any good reason and headed Görlitz without any good reason ... According to the laws of wartime he was shot."

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There were other posters as well. Here is another egregious example. An eyewitness recalled:

"I was shocked by the death of the burgomaster of Brokau, Burno Kurzbach. From the text of the announcement, we learned that he left his post on January 26. As it turned out during interrogation, for security reasons he wanted to move his family to Striegau. From Striegau, he telephoned Breslau to find out whether the rumors that Brokau was occupied by the Russians were true. Since there was no connection with the city, he considered that it had been captured by the enemy. Kurzbach himself considered it his duty to inform the Land Council by postcard that he was awaiting further orders in Striegau. This was followed by accusations that the burgomaster left the city to its fate. As a result, he was shot by order of the Gauleiter.

Often, officials were shot even for leaving their residence. As soon as he was outside his place of residence, a person was already considered a coward and a deserter.

However, there were some amazing cases. Ernst Horning recalled one of them. After the capitulation, one of the young parishioners of St. Barbara's church told him about it. Her younger brother, who was just 16 years old, was shot according to the notorious "laws of war." The boy himself flatly refused to volunteer for the Volkssturm. When to

Some fanatically inclined worker addressed him on the street, why he was not in the ranks of the people's militia, the teenager replied:

"Perhaps it is thanks to me that Adolf will never win the war."

The worker reported this case "where it should be", and the next day the boy was shot.

If we talk about the general mood of the inhabitants of Breslau, they thought about these executions with horror and disgust. This attitude also extended to party structures. On the one hand, the grassroots structures of the NSDAP, of course, could not be denied some concern for the population in the surrounded city, but, on the other hand, the residents were dissatisfied with tough measures, when women and children were forcibly involved in risky work. As a result, the moods that prevailed in society, according to Ernst Horning, were directed against the Gauleiter and the local party leadership. The excessive cruelty of the ambitious Gauleiter became obvious to everyone when another announcement appeared:

"Whoever appropriates the property of the evacuated people's comrades must be executed as a robber and marauder. This wartime principle was applied to two women."

In the days when there was a real danger of a breakthrough by Soviet troops in Breslau from the north, Hugo Ertung wrote in his diary:

"January 30. Bad news comes from the cadets from the military school. They suffer big losses. In addition, many of them are at risk of frostbite. Boys are sent to snow-covered positions in low shoes.

Actually, in those days, not only young cadets were sick. It was during these days that General Krause collapsed with pneumonia.

Another event happened in the last days of January. An SS officer appeared at Ernst Horning's house. He announced to the evangelical priest that he had to convey the order of the Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler. According to this order, all the priests of the city of Breslau had to leave it within 24 hours. Hornig himself objected. He explained that he could only take this instruction into consideration. The SS officer did not object or threaten in response. Hornig himself emphasized in his memoirs that he had

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the impression that the SS rank arrived from Berlin only in order to voice the order, but he did not care much about the execution of it. Besides, leaving the city was not safe. Priests could be mistaken for "deserters" like shot officials. As a result, a delegation from Catholics and evangelists went to Khanka. Gauleiter stressed that this was the first time he had heard of such an order from Himmler. After long negotiations with representatives of party bodies and the local structure of the Gestapo, it was decided that the choice - to stay in the city or not - was the personal will of each priest.

Meanwhile, the inhabitants of Breslau began to express considerable concern that the threat of complete encirclement hung over the city. Even the reports of the Wehrmacht High Command spoke of the seriousness of the situation. The February 4 document read as follows:

"The 6th Russian Army takes up positions on a wide front from Gleiwitz to Waldenburg. Breslau can be expected to be pincered."

Now literally everyone is talking about the threat of a blockade. The critical situation of the fortress was even written in the statements of the local party organization and commandant's office. On February 6, after lengthy delays, the Gauleiter's appeal appeared.

"Citizens and women of Breslau! Again and again we see at the stations and exit roads that people's comrades are evacuated from Breslau, carrying their belongings. Since families with children should be evacuated first of all, those who returned to the city for their belongings will no longer be able to evacuate by rail. The authorities have been ordered to detain anyone who, without identity documents, tries to leave the city on foot."

Contrary to all the statements made after the war, the former military command of the fortress did not pay due attention to the evacuation of the civilian population. For this reason, the new commandant of the fortress, Major General Hans von Alphen, signed the order on February 7:

"All women with children, as well as women over 40, must leave Breslau."

The Silesian Daily, which was the only local official organ of the NSDAP, on February 9 published a new, very long order from the commandant of the fortress. It reported, among other things, on the reasons for its appearance:

"According to the order, I replaced the ill Major General Krause as the commandant of the fortress."

The following was the text of the order that von Alphen received on January 26, 1945. The commandant of the fortress appealed "to the self-esteem and conscience of each employee of the Wehrmacht." It is significant that the general criticized "the old German mistake and the morbid tendency to bureaucracy and paperwork, which had to be got rid of as much as possible. As the main idea in the order-appeal, an appeal was made: soon."

"To maintain steadfastness and strength of faith, and also not to be embarrassed by unfavorable reports of the state of the city and the actions of the enemy."

Von Alphen also urged not to ask the question of whether following orders can lead to death, but to ask oneself: "How will I complete the task entrusted to me?". The general even quoted Fichte's famous words:

"You must think about the future of Germany, about the revival of your people. Don't let what's happening around you rob you of faith. You must act as if the fate of the whole matter depended on your actions and on you personally."

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As can be seen from the style, this order was addressed primarily to units of the Wehrmacht and the Volkssturm. Actually, it was addressed to 40,000 poorly armed soldiers and Volkssturmmen. But do not reproach von Alphen too much, do not forget that at that time Schörner was the commander of Army Group Center, who terrified all his subordinates. It was he who began to actively use executions for the retreating soldiers.

Gauleiter Hanke could not stand aside. In his addresses, he turned to historical examples: by 1241, when the German-Slavic army was able to stop the advance of the Mongols at the Battle of Liegnitz, or by 1813, when Prussia rose up against Napoleon, and Breslau was one of the first cities to support the call of King Frederick - Wilhelm II "To my people". He also urged students to follow the spirit of history.

On February 7, 1945, a distinguished guest arrived in Breslau - the secretary of the Imperial Ministry of Public Education and Propaganda Naumann arrived in the fortress from Berlin. A month ago he gave a speech in Poznań. Then he argued that the Eastern Front was stronger than ever, that the Russian offensive would be put to an end. He promised those present new weapons and new armies. But these were empty promises. A month later, Naumann no longer dared to make such reckless vows. He only called on the officers to hold the fortress to the last man.

Naumann was a leading member of the Joseph Goebbels ministry. He was a man who, to the very end, was at the mercy of his own illusions. It is not surprising that Hitler, in his political testament, made him Goebbels' successor as Reich Minister of Propaganda; Goebbels himself was to become Chancellor of the Reich. Actually, the appearance of Naumann in Breslau, Hanke's fiefdom, was not surprising. Hanke himself was in his tenure closely connected with the Ministry of Propaganda.

As Russian researcher K. Zalesky noted in one of the articles: "In general, Hanke was an extremely interesting and, of course, a talented person and stood out from a number of other party hierarchs of the Third Reich." Back in April 1931, Hanke was dismissed from the school for too active National Socialist activity, and Goebbels immediately transferred him to a paid (albeit not very high) freed party work. From that moment until the end of his life, Hanke was a party functionary. A new appointment for Hanke was the post of bezirksleiter (district leader), and then kreisleiter (district leader) of West Berlin. It should be noted that this was already a fairly high position in the Nazi party hierarchy: the Gauleiter stood higher, i.e. the head of the Gau - and this is already the crown of a career. Berlin, in administrative terms, was later divided into 10 krayzes - in 1931 there were even fewer of them. At the same time, Hanke became a gauredner (i.e., an official speaker on political issues) and a betribszellenredner (i.e., a speaker at enterprises) and, in this capacity, became actively involved in Nazi propaganda campaigns.

In 1932, Hanke became Goebbels's personal adjutant and assistant (by position of imperial propaganda chief) and the first head of organizational matters of the Gau Berlin. In the elections of April 24, 1932, Hanke was elected a member of the Prussian Landtag, and on November 6, 1932, a member of the Reichstag for the 3rd district (Potsdam P) and thus became a figure of all-German scale. Hanke remained a member of the Reichstag until the collapse of the Third Reich. On the same day, November 6, Goebbels transferred Hanke from Gau Berlin to his apparatus - the NSDAP Imperial Propaganda Office - as Hauptamtsleiter (head of the main department).

After Hitler came to power, Hanke's patron Joseph Goebbels was able to take control of all propaganda work in Germany, and when the creation of the Imperial Ministry of Public Education and Propaganda was announced on March 13, 1933, Hanke was transferred to its central office and appointed as a personal assistant and the head of the personal secretariat of the imperial minister (Joseph Goebbels became them). In June 1933, Hanke received the rank of ministerial adviser. In February 1934, Hanke joined the SS (ticket number 203 103) and on August 7 of the same year received the title

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SS Sturmbannführer. A career in the SS went in parallel with the party-state: on January 23, 1934, Hanke was enrolled in the headquarters of the Reichsführer SS, on July 1, 1934 he became the Führer for special assignments at the headquarters of the XXSH Abshnita SS and, finally, on April 1, 1936, he again got into the headquarters of the Reichsführer SS .

In June 1934, Hanke accompanied Goebbels on his official visit to Warsaw and Krakow. In January 1937, Hanke, while remaining head of the secretariat, also received the post of 2nd vice-president of the Imperial Chamber of Culture (Goebbels was president): in fact, Hanke fell on all the daily work on this body. On April 20, 1934, he received the rank of ministerial director, and on January 15, 1938, he became secretary of state (i.e., deputy minister) of the Imperial Ministry of Public Education and Propaganda. At the same time, "on the job" Hanke underwent retraining in military units (November - December 1937). In parallel with the development of a career in the civil service, Hanke also grew in the ranks of the SS: on April 12, 1935, he became Obersturmbannführer, already on September 5 of the same year - Standartenführer, on April 20, 1937 - Oberführer SS.

But back to Breslau. The commander of the 17th Infantry Division, General Sachsenheimer, vividly depicted how the ring of the Soviet encirclement closed around Breslau in his memoirs:

"On the night of February 10-11, there was no longer any way to hold back the advance of powerful tank columns that were moving along the highway in the direction of Kant-Breslau ... Parts of General Leper were ordered to take up defenses on both sides of the highway ... From 11 to On February 13, our front line of defense ran from Schlaupe to the Oder, through Jashkendorf and the hills, located just east of the New Market, to Franketal. These days the Russians struck on both sides of the highway. There was no way to recapture the territory they had occupied. The outcome of these battles boiled down to the fact that the enemy, inflicting continuous blows along the highway, closed the encirclement around Breslau.

In this regard, Sachsenheimer recalled an episode that occurred near the village of Leuthen (Neumarkt district - New Market), where Frederick the Great won a landslide victory in 1757 during the Seven Years' War. The front was gradually moving towards Breslau. The general could not forget one woman who, not wanting to leave her home, decided to help the retreating division. By the most ordinary phone, looking out of the window, she transmitted information about the Soviet units passing by.

The Germans clearly lacked the strength to resist the Soviet offensive. Sachsenheimer clearly understood this even during the fighting along the highway. The Red Army had an undeniable numerical advantage. To the south of the city, after several battles, Domslau, Klettendorf, Schöngarten, Hartlieb were occupied by Soviet troops. Soon, units of the Red Army found themselves at the so-called ring road, which could lead to the Mohburn, Schmidefeld and Brokau stations. By and large, the Soviet troops were only 5 kilometers from the city center. The pincers of the Soviet offensive tightened: in the southeast - in the Olau region, and in the west - in the Malcha region.

Those who did not have time to get out of the city still cherished vague hopes. How else? After all, back on February 13, the report of the Wehrmacht High Command said:

"In Lower Silesia, our units launched a counterattack, which thwarted the Soviet attempt to cut off the Breslau fortress from the main German forces. On a small sector of the front southwest of the city, the enemy lost about 60 tanks in battle.

But on February 14, all communication with the "outside world" in the south of the city was suddenly cut off. The whole day the inhabitants of the city were in some confusion. And only on February 15, General von Alphen announced:

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"Citizens of Breslau! Our fortress is completely surrounded. This should not come as a surprise to you, since the fortress must constantly live with the idea that it will have to fight in the environment ... We must prepare for the fact that mines, shells and bombs will burst on the streets of our fortress. During the defense of the fortress, this is normal. It is unworthy for every citizen to lose self-control under this fire. Remember that in our history there are many examples of how fortresses were surrounded, but continued to successfully defend themselves ... If shells fall on Breslau, then you need to remain calm and hide in the cellars! To strengthen our defense, bridges across the Oder can be blown up. Don't lose courage!"

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But back to the Soviet troops, which we left in the positions they occupied on February 14, 1945. On February 15, units of the Red Army closed the encirclement around Breslau, the fortress was under siege. The position of the Germans could not be called hopeless. In the south, positions were held by 3-4 regiments, and one more each in the south-west, west and north. Properly chosen positions for defense could allow the Germans to ignore the numerical superiority of the Soviet troops for a long time, who intended to storm the fortress.

It is possible that, inspired by the rapid offensive and tactical successes of January 1945, the Soviet command was in the grip of illusions about the possibility of prolonged resistance by the defenders of Breslau. Once on German soil, the units of the Red Army already felt like winners and did not expect to face such fierce resistance. General von Alphen himself recalled on this occasion:

"It is possible that the enemy command, in its characteristic manner, launched a quick, impetuous offensive without lengthy preparation for it. However, the direction of the main attack, which after February 7 more and more moved to the south, was chosen correctly.

Indeed, there were no natural barriers to the south of Breslau, except for such a difficultly rugged terrain. Despite the rapid advance of the Soviet troops, fortunately for the Germans, they acted completely inconsistently. The attack on Breslau from the south, from the north and from the west did not represent any single operation, each section seemed almost an independent theater of operations. The German group in Breslau was able to take advantage of this circumstance.

After the most powerful "southern" Soviet grouping of troops was limited only to reconnaissance in battle during February 14–16, the long-planned attack on the fortress began on February 17. It started between Klettendorf and Brokau with the most powerful artillery preparation. But on the "western" and "northern" fronts, the Soviet troops preferred to be limited to small operations, mainly of a reconnaissance nature.

As already mentioned, south of the urban outskirts of Breslau there were neither well-fortified defensive positions nor natural barriers. It was very problematic for the German troops to resist the superior forces of the Red Army in this sector of the battle. Anticipating the consequences of this Soviet offensive, the command of the fortress sent the most experienced, so to speak, "old" military units to this area. Despite the fact that they were inevitably forced to retreat, it can be noted that the Soviet offensive did not at all turn into a "red flood". For several days of fighting (February 17-22), units of the Red Army managed to advance deep into the German positions no more than 2 kilometers. At the same time, the German "old" units themselves did not lose their relationship with the "young" military formations, which in the current conditions could be considered a tactical success. But in any case, the Germans failed to stop the Soviet offensive.

During the fighting that began on the "southern" front, the Bethesda hospital located nearby began to fill with the wounded almost immediately. Many of the German soldiers were wounded in the head. Senior nurse Margarita Ziegler recalled the events of February 16:

"It was terrible to see so many young people with severe head wounds and damaged eyes. The soldiers could hardly hold back the onslaught, they did not have enough ammunition and weapons.

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Despite the constant threat of bombing and artillery attacks, the Bethesda continued to operate throughout February and March 1945.

The Soviet troops with fighting managed to take the southern railway dam. It was in this area that they first entered the territory of the city. During these battles, the Soviet command, as well as

the Red Army soldiers themselves, received a clear understanding that the defenders of Breslau were not going to surrender. During the first battles already in the city, it turned out that the Germans were going to fight to the last bullet. So, for example, on the evening of February 20, the 55th Volkssturm battalion, formed from members of the Hitler Youth (Seifert), launched a counterattack on the territory of the southern park. During this lightning-fast sortie, during which the teenagers themselves suffered almost no losses, the Red Army soldiers were driven out of the city. This tactical success of the Germans, for which there were practically no prerequisites, was of great importance for all the defenders of Breslau. As General Alphen noted: "Their morale has been strengthened." The Red Army men themselves realized that they could not count on a quick victory and a quick capture of the fortress.

For the command of the fortress, the results of this daring sortie also had some methodological significance. A reasonable conclusion was drawn that fanatical youth were better used for fast-paced, but not prolonged operations, such as counterattacks. It was under these conditions that the teenagers from the Hitler Youth could demonstrate their explosive character. At the same time, it was taken into account that they could not, due to their mental characteristics, participate in protracted battles. For this reason, an agreement in principle was reached between the local leadership of the Hitler Youth and the commandant of Breslau that after the end of the operation, the 55th and 56th Volkssturm "youth" battalions would be withdrawn from the front line in order to give them a rest and prepare for a new sortie. The rest itself was to be used for their military and tactical training. As practice has shown, such tactics of attracting teenagers from the Hitler Youth turned out to be very effective. The very same counterattack, undertaken towards the end of February 20, became a kind of appeal to the youth of Breslau.

Many units were in the battles in the "south". One of the participants in the defensive battles on February 20 recalled:

"The Luftwaffe regiment under the command of Wehl, together with the Volkssturm, tried to stop the Russian advance. The fiercest battles unfolded for the so-called Kinder Tsopten. Now the ring road dam has become the front line of our defense. Here people stood to death.

The aforementioned Kinder-Zobten hill was a favorite playground for the children of Breslau. In the spring here they played in the flowering willows, in the summer and autumn they flew kites, and in the winter they went sledding. Now this hill has become a place of bloody battles.

The German group could not boast of exceptional combat capability. The retreat from the southern railway embankment was considered by many to be a sign of not the most competent command, but, on the other hand, it was this tactical withdrawal that allowed the Germans to concentrate their forces and prevent the penetration of Soviet troops towards the center of Breslau. Von Alphen, in his memoirs, seemed to be trying to justify this step:

"This railway embankment was only a small section of the entire front. I have already said that for a number of reasons in January they refused to dismantle the four-line railway lines. If fortification work had begun nearby in time, then this massive transport facility could have been prepared for defense. But for this it was necessary to attract specialists from the Silesian mines and the necessary funds in the autumn of 1944. However, when the fortress was alerted, we no longer had the strength or time to begin these works. On the crest of the embankment, only in some places trenches and machine-gun nests were dug.

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At the same time, the German positions were so obvious that the Red Army troops did not even intend to storm them. Most machine gun nests and trenches were simply destroyed by Soviet artillery.

In addition, there was no defense system in depth from the dam further into the city. From a tactical point of view, the retreat from the dam, which, under the right conditions, of course, could become an excellent defensive line, was the right decision. Its holding could end in the loss of significant forces. Since the beginning of February, the fortress headquarters has been considering the possibility of using this structure for defensive battles. It was for this reason that 16 bridges and overpasses were mined near the embankment, and when the German troops retreated, they were all blown up. Their wreckage blocked the way for Soviet tanks. By the time of the explosion of these objects (February 20), the German units located in the southern sectors of the battles could no longer resist the armored vehicles of the Red Army. Under the prevailing conditions, neither the use of faustpatrons, nor bold attacks could stop the advance of Soviet technology into the city center. The abandonment of the railway embankment and the destruction of the overpasses was one of the reasons why the Soviet troops could not break through to the center of the fortress at the end of February 1945. As a result, the commander of the sapper regiment, Major Hameister, who arrived in Breslau on February 18 by plane, was able to apply his knowledge and skills in other areas of the battle.

At this time, the 609th division was fighting defensive battles on the front stretching from Oltashin to the intricate cemetery and garden areas. Adjoining the division on the right flank, Vel's regiment fought at the railroad embankment that curved to the northwest, which in the southern section was already completely controlled by Soviet troops. The threat of a powerful Soviet attack from the flank loomed over this regiment, which could result not only in numerous losses, but also in the loss of significant territories. To all this was added the fact that already at the beginning of the battles for the city, the German artillery began to experience enormous difficulties with ammunition. To some extent, the Germans managed to correct the situation through the use of "Goliaths", remote-controlled wedges that could carry a significant supply of explosives. With the help of these tankettes, the Germans managed to destroy houses and buildings that were occupied by the Red Army. For example, the blowing up of the building of the 4th tram depot, in which the Red Army soldiers were located, not only led to significant losses among the Soviet soldiers, but also had a very negative impact on their morale. In parts of the Red Army, they started talking about the use by the Germans of the notorious "wonder weapon". But if the Soviet units failed to break through the German defenses, then this did not stop the bloody battles at all. Soviet attacks after February 20 followed one after another. They were made day and night. General von Alphen recalled these days:

"The enemy, with the fire of all the anti-tank guns at his disposal, tried to break our resistance, which relied mainly on the corner houses of the streets. Incendiary bombs and shells set fire to many houses, and individual streets turned into a sea of \u200b\u200bfire, which we tried to prevent from spreading further.

As a result, in order not to burn out, the Germans were forced to leave individual buildings and cede territory to the Soviet troops. In those days, fierce battles went on behind the building of the cuirassier barracks, which changed hands several times a day. As a result, Vel's regiment was ordered to leave their positions and retreat. Now he had to take up well-fortified positions along the line of the Breslau Land Office - Opitz Strasse - Höfchen Square - Lorraine Strasse. On February 22, Vel's regiment in this sector of the front was relieved by More's regiment. Vel's regiment itself was sent to the calmer "northern" front.

Such a change of regiments, in close cooperation with the 609th division located on the left flank, became a turning point in the defense of the southern borders of Breslau. From that moment until the very surrender of the fortress, which took place in May 1945, the Soviet troops were unable to achieve any noticeable tactical success on this sector of the front. With an approximately equal balance of forces, the defenders of the city were in more

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advantageous position than the Red Army, whose units suffered huge losses in each attack. General Alphen himself was forced to admit:

"The transfer of More's regiment took place at the most critical moment."

Here you can quote a message that was reprinted by a Stockholm messenger from a Moscow newspaper. It spoke of the fighting in Breslau:

"Fights go on not only for every floor, but literally for every window in which the Germans installed machine guns and other automatic weapons! It is difficult to understand how the Germans provide themselves with ammunition, food and water. During the entire war, one could find only a few examples of such a fanatical struggle as in Breslau, where a complete contempt for death is demonstrated.

If we talk about German counterattacks and sorties, then one cannot fail to mention the amazing tactical success that the reconnaissance group under the command of Oberleutnant Wolf, Knight's Cross, was able to achieve. The group commander, who before the war served as a non-commissioned officer in Breslau, knew all the edges inside and out. More than once at night he went to the rear of the Soviet units, inflicting swift blows. Each of these sorties usually ended

language capture.

If we talk about the military operations of the Mora regiment on the "northern" front, then first of all it is necessary to note the actions of the Tenschert battalion. He occupied positions on the forward segment of the front near Sakrow and Hundsfeld. Anticipating the impact of the Soviet forces in this direction, he was able to leave his positions in time. Having evaded the battle with the superior forces of the Red Army, Tenschert's battalion confused all the cards for the Soviet command. A powerful blow was struck into the void. When the German battalion occupied new positions on the banks of the Vaida River, it ran into several advanced detachments of the Red Army. They could not orient themselves in the darkness, and almost all died in a fierce night battle.

The use of More's regiment on the "southern" front was a very prudent step. On February 21, Lieutenant Colonel More was "cautiously" warned of a possible change of position. A little later, the commandant of the fortress informed him about the critical situation that was developing on the southern borders of Breslau, after which he asked him to state his vision of the problem with a little justification for the proposed solution.

After Mora's regiment was in the south, he repeatedly received reinforcements - it was difficult to hold positions, sometimes at the cost of heavy losses. As of March 1, 1945, Mohr's regiment consisted of seven infantry battalions, five Volkssturm battalions, one unit armed with "ofenrors" and three batteries of anti-aircraft artillery. During the fighting, the regiment was actively supported by the main forces of the German artillery.

During the defensive battles, Lieutenant Colonel More applied, in fact, a new tactic of warfare. Infantry battalions were located on the front line. On the second line of defense, just at the junction of the positions of the infantry units, the Volkssturm battalions were located. They played the role not so much of a reserve as of replenishment. As a result, not separate divisions of the Volkssturm entered the battle, but only individual Volkssturmmen, who were surrounded by more experienced infantrymen. Such a technique helped at least somehow solve the problem of education and training of the militias.

The "southern" front constantly attracted the attention of the fortress command, but the real headache for the headquarters was to ensure the operation of the Gandau airfield, in particular, the ability to organize night landings of cargo planes that delivered ammunition. On the night of February 15-16, the first attempt was made to establish an "air bridge" with Breslau. During the day, air communication with the fortress was hardly possible, since Soviet aviation dominated the air. The planes were supposed to deliver shells in the first place, and take the wounded back. But the next night of hope for

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the permanent functioning of this communication channel were destroyed. Soviet specialists began to jam low-power radio bearings in Gandau, which German cargo planes were guided by. As a result, transports loaded with ammunition were forced to turn back, and the wounded German soldiers awaiting transport were returned to their hospitals. However, the Germans themselves found that even in this unfortunate situation there were advantages. General von Alphen wrote:

"It was good that this overlay happened early enough that we still had time to fix it."

The current situation revealed several miscalculations in the organization of the "air bridge". But one should not forget that the headquarters of the fortress did not have an experienced pilot officer who could take on not only all the concerns for ensuring the activities of Gandau, but also general negotiations with the air fleet of Colonel General Ritter von Greim. The fortress headquarters asked for a much-needed Luftwaffe officer to be brought to Breslau. On February 24, Lieutenant Colonel Friedeburg was brought by plane. However, until the moment of his arrival, all the problems of building an "air bridge" were placed on the shoulders of the commandant.

It should be noted that in all matters related to the airfield, the commandant himself violated the subordination so beloved in the German army. He went directly to the junior ranks and gave them orders. This is how, for example, the search for the necessary equipment was organized at the airfield of the Schöngraten military pilot school. During this raid, which took place under constant Soviet shelling, the Germans managed to find radio stations and bearings that could not be jammed by the Red Army radio operators. As a result, after a two-day downtime, the "air bridge" started working again. Ammunition, which at that time they tried to drop by parachute, as a rule, did not get to the Germans. These "parcels" landed either on the territory occupied by the Red Army, or in the impassable flooded lowlands of the Ole. As a result, the quartermaster had to postpone all business and engage in the extraction (if possible) of ammunition. After the trouble-free radio direction finders were installed, cargo began to be delivered by air in two ways. They could both be unloaded from aircraft that landed at the airfield, and parachuted from the air, focusing already on radio bearings. However, the headquarters of the fortress itself could not influence this situation in any way. The method of delivery of ammunition was chosen in accordance with the conditions that the commandant of the fortress could not change in any way. On the other side of the front, factors such as the presence of free planes, the activity of Soviet aviation, meteorological conditions, as well as the availability of the necessary ammunition, which were not always enough even outside the environment, were taken into account. One thing was clear: air release of ammunition would be used despite the fact that the amount of cargo released in this way was very small and could not be compared with the volumes that could be unloaded from an aircraft that landed at the airfield. Everyone understood that it was a forced decision.

In any case, without air supplies, Breslau could not count on a long defense. General von Alphen wrote on this occasion:

"Many tend to view supply, in particular the supply of ammunition, as a secondary matter that should not be handled by the commander. He must be thinking about other things. Undoubtedly, the commander and his first assistant, first of all, must devote themselves entirely to the conduct of hostilities. The supply of food for the voracious guns must be taken care of by the quartermaster and his assistants. Like, this is their problem, how they will cope with this task. However, when in Breslau, apart from small stocks of artillery shells, there was nothing, then the commander, the quartermaster and the main consumer of these stocks, the artillery commander, had to establish very close, I would even say, friendly cooperation.

The concern of the fortress headquarters with the supply of artillery shells will become clear if we take into account at least the fact that there were

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only 50 min. As a result, this formidable weapon was used only in exceptional cases. General von Alphen himself noted that their constant use was "an unforgivable luxury." As a result, in the battles on the southern borders of the city, fire was mainly fired from light field howitzers, while it was decided to put heavy mortars with minimal ammunition into action in the most critical situation.

The close cooperation established at the headquarters of the fortress played a positive role for the Germans. So, for example, in conditions of a constant shortage of ammunition, it was necessary to introduce the practice of their reasonable rationing. Every day, by telephone, which continued to connect encircled Breslau with the rest of Army Group Center, the commandant of the fortress clarified information about the planned amount of ammunition that was planned to be delivered to the fortress at night. Based on this information, a "ration" was compiled for units that had to perform important tasks. Those who were on the defensive had a significantly smaller supply of ammunition than those who were to carry out offensive operations. After the unloading of ammunition took place at night, the Breslau command made (or did not make) adjustments to the order to supply individual units that were supposed to participate in the battles the next morning. This practice made it possible to always have at least an insignificant, but sufficient supply of ammunition at our disposal in order to prevent the possible penetration of Soviet troops into the territory of the city. The practice of "rationing" ammunition proved to be very useful for the Germans, in particular, during the battles for the Gandau airfield.

Almost immediately after February 23, 1945, tank-reinforced units of the Red Army launched an offensive against the positions of the Khanfa regiment. The goal of the Red Army was the village of Neukirch, which played almost a key role in the defense of the Gandau airfield. The battles for the village went on with varying success. At some point, it might have seemed that Soviet tanks were able to break through the German defense line. However, because of the cemetery fence, fire from faustpatrons fell on them. When the Soviet tanks decided to turn into the neighboring village streets, they came under fire from a German anti-tank gun. As a result, the Soviet units were forced to retreat after an unsuccessful breakthrough to Neukirch. Now parts of the Red Army began to concentrate at Schöngraten and Lobruk. It was a tactical mistake that the Soviet command would soon realize. The Breslau headquarters noticed these movements in time. As a result, almost all the available artillery was transferred to this sector of the front. Without waiting for the Soviet offensive, the Germans opened fire on the positions where the Red Army soldiers were gathering. Due to their extreme concentration, almost every German shot hit the target. The losses of the Red Army were so high that no offensive operations were undertaken in this area until the end of February.

However, the Soviet troops, intending to take the airfield, attacked the German positions from more than one direction. Even before February 20, units of the Red Army began to pull up to the Weistritz-German Lissa section. The Soviet command intended to recapture the once-occupied Peiskerwitz from the SS Besslein regiment. During fierce fighting, the SS managed to repel all the attacks of the Red Army. In this situation, the Germans were rescued by a good knowledge of the area, which, of course, the Soviet soldiers could not boast of. On the third day of fighting, Besslein's regiment was forced to retreat somewhat. He retreated to the Masselwitz-Neukirch line. But the general situation in the southern sector of the front obliged the commander of the SS regiment to maintain constant contact with his "neighbors" along the northern edge of the cemetery. A gap in the line of defense could have the most adverse consequences for the Germans.

If we talk about the battles fought by the Besslein regiment, it should be noted that in the morning hours of February 18, it was supported by several "goliaths". The unit that successfully used remote-controlled tankettes against the Soviet troops was commanded by Lieutenant Kone.

Looking back a few days, it can be noted that the SS regiment took up positions near Waistrinz on February 14th. A couple of days later, the headquarters of the fortress from the regiment reported that the Soviet sappers successfully coped with the restoration of the once blown up overpass on Reichs Strasse. Lieutenant Kone received a personal order from the commandant of the fortress. On the night of February 16, he conducted reconnaissance in the Waistrintz area. On

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The next day he reported on its results:

"Ivans should not calmly continue their work. I propose personally to prepare a special group on February 17th in order to attack their positions early in the morning of February 18th.

The offer seemed very tempting to General von Alphen.

On February 18, 1945, a little before light, Lieutenant Kone sent his unit to the overpass being restored by Soviet sappers. At that moment, the Red Army made an unforgivable oversight. In the morning silence, one could clearly hear the noise of approaching tankettes. But, apparently, no one paid attention to him. In order to ensure the unhindered penetration of the explosive machines onto the bridge, Besslein's regiment had to launch a diversionary offensive. After three Goliaths reached their original positions around 6 a.m., the SS opened fire on Soviet positions with artillery and mortars. The noise of shelling was supposed to drown out the noise of engines and the clang of small caterpillars, thanks to which the wedges moved. Before the Red Army men noticed the Goliaths, the first of them had already reached the middle of the restored bridge, and the other two were steadily approaching it. Each of the tankettes carried from 75 to 225 kilograms of explosives. There were three explosions, and the overpass bridge plunged into a cloud of debris and dust. When the clouds of smoke dissipated, the Germans noticed that with the help of the Goliaths, two spans of the bridge were completely destroyed, and some supports were thrown into the stream flowing under it. For the Germans, this was an undoubted tactical success. Soviet attacks in the direction of the Gandau airfield were delayed for several days. At the same time, the Germans themselves did not suffer virtually any losses during this operation - only one of the sappers was slightly wounded.

Continuing the conversation about the battles for the Gandau airfield (offensive for the Red Army, defensive for the Germans), we note that the defenders of Breslau used their own artillery in this sector much more actively than on the once critical "southern" front. At the same time, considerable skill was required from the German artillerymen in order to correctly use the guns. The fact is that the height of individual houses did not allow them to accurately aim. The task was complicated by the fact that in the course of street fighting, positions could constantly change. Some houses and lanes changed hands several times a day. As a result, German artillery, with erroneous calculations, could cover their own soldiers with fire. In order to prevent such a mistake, the headquarters of the fortress, together with the commander of the artillery units, began to search for a suitable observation post in the area of the battles for Gandau. As a result, the choice was made on the reinforced concrete warehouse building, which was not affected by artillery fire and Soviet bombing, which was located to the north-west of the meadows. The apparent panorama made it possible to see the whole picture right up to the Tsochten River itself (not to be confused with the city of the same name, which is currently called Sobotka). As a result, the Germans managed to very successfully coordinate the actions of artillery and combined arms formations. The opened view made it possible to trace the movement of all Soviet troops, which, in turn, made it possible to carry out a timely regrouping of the garrison forces. It was from this observation point that it was noticed that the columns of Soviet troops began to move from the "southern" front to the "north-western" one. The commandant of the fortress, of course, gave the order to take appropriate measures. As a result, in March, units of the Red Army failed to break through to the city center from an "unexpected" north-western direction.

The Germans managed to stop the Soviet attack on the airfield. At least one fact speaks of its strategic importance. The Breslau command refused to conduct a counteroffensive on the "southern" front, although the Soviet positions were very favorable for this - the flanks of the Red Army units were open. It was assumed that the simultaneous offensive of the 609th division to the southwest and Mora's regiment to the southeast could push back Soviet troops from the southern outskirts of the city. But when miscalculating the situation at the headquarters of the fortress, they abandoned this very successful plan. General von Alphen explained this decision as follows:

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"Success in the south, which we could achieve in a few days, would cost us most of the ammunition. In addition, this operation would have shackled our few free reserves. But at this time, an attack on Gandau could begin! During the regrouping of our troops, we could lose the airfield. In this situation, it would be more correct to keep all reserves in combat readiness, and on the southern sector of the front to harass the enemy with protracted defensive battles in which he would simply bleed to death.

The German general was right in many respects. The ruins of houses, numerous basements and labyrinths of narrow streets, which did not allow Soviet light artillery to fire directly, gave the Germans a clear advantage in a defensive battle. Fears about the loss of Gandau were not empty. Soviet troops constantly tried to attack in the Neukirch area. There was not even a stable front line here. She was constantly moving back and forth. With the onset of darkness, the active work of the German engineering units began, which unloaded the aircraft that arrived from the "mainland". The ammunition was much more valuable than the recaptured positions south of Breslau. In addition, special Volkssturm battalions were constantly used after dark to level the runways of the airfield. During daylight hours, Gandau was constantly fired upon by Soviet artillery and bombed.

In the second half of February, the Breslau headquarters, in addition to the actual conduct of hostilities, was forced to deal with many other issues, the solution of which required urgent action. For the most part, all these problems were caused by mistakes and miscalculations that were made by the High Command or the command of Army Group Center. The story about them is better to start with the simplest things. From February 15, that is, from the moment the Breslau fortress was surrounded by Soviet troops, orders began to come from the outside for the transfer of soldiers, railway employees and specialists from various industries from the city. Naturally, such measures only weakened the defense of the Silesian capital. In some cases, ready-made personal lists came to be sent to the "mainland", but in some cases they were compiled by the commandant of the fortress. So, for example, an order arrived in Breslau to transport soldiers of the 269th and 17th divisions by plane from the city, who were supposed to

"reunite" with their military units.

In addition, it was not worth writing off the fact that leaving Breslau by plane actually meant getting rid of certain death. Disputes immediately began about who would be the first to leave the surrounded city. To the credit of the command of the fortress, it must be said that it immediately decided not to take into account any "thieves". In order to avoid excesses and criticism both from above and from below, it was decided to entrust the compilation of lists for departure via the "air bridge" to a trusted and trustworthy officer. As a result, this task was entrusted to the captain of the reserve Langen. After completing his military service, he was engaged in agriculture in Zantkau (Trebenitz district). With the beginning of the Soviet winter offensive, he and his family began to retreat to the west. In the end, he stayed to participate in the defense of Breslau. Captain Langen himself was known for his integrity and incorruptibility, so the commandant of the fortress could be calm - exactly those people who really needed to be evacuated were on the list for evacuation by air.

At first, the evacuation lists were personally certified by General von Alphen. But later he stopped doing it. However, making lists was not the essence of this assignment. Sometimes it was necessary to make very responsible decisions. By order of the High Command, the director of the FAMO enterprise, Werner Spott, was supposed to be taken out of Breslau by plane, who was supposed to be entrusted with setting up production in Schönbeck-Elbe. By this time, the FAMO enterprise had several wrecked German tanks that needed to be repaired. However, the repairs could not be completed, since there were no gun barrels suitable for tanks in Breslau. The fortress had only field and anti-aircraft artillery. As a result, Shpott received a personal assignment from the commandant. Upon arrival on the "mainland", he had to make sure that the necessary gun barrels were delivered to Breslau. As a result, a conversation took place between

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Shpott and the Reich Minister for Armaments Albert Speer. The conversation had a favorable outcome for the defenders of the city.

Of no lesser military importance was the arrival of artillery officers to the fortress, who were supposed to bring with them firing tables for the guns that the Germans had in their time as trophies. All of them had different goniometers-quadrants, which made it difficult to fire. In solving this problem, a significant role was played by the fact that the commandant of the fortress could contact the command of the Center group by telephone. This saved a lot of time, as General von Alphen explained exactly what he needed.

Separately, we need to talk about Gauleiter Hanke. If at the beginning of the battles for Breslau, in particular, in the southern direction, Hanke tried to stay in the background, then after February 20, 1945, he appeared almost daily at the commandant of the fortress. At first, General von Alphen believed that the Gauleiter would not interfere with him. Moreover, he considered it quite logical that the military command should have worked closely with a representative of the civil administration, and therefore there is nothing shameful in the story about the strategic position of the city. In addition, the party organs of the NSDAP could perform a number of important tasks, thereby unloading the military command of Breslau. But over time, Hanke's behavior became more and more defiant.

The question arises by itself: did the Gauleiter have the right to demand an account from the military command? Yes, he did, because in Breslau he was not just a Gauleiter, but also the Reich Commissar for Defense. It is difficult to judge whether the introduction of such posts anywhere contributed to the strengthening of defense in the Reich, but one can say unequivocally about Breslau - here it only harmed. Among other things, Hanke had at his disposal a powerful radio station, with the help of which he maintained constant contact with Berlin, namely with the Reich Chancellery and Martin Bormann personally. In his memoirs, General von Alphen spoke very carefully about the figure of Gauleiter Hanke:

"It was unfair, and indeed wrong from a historical point of view, to deny him energy and will. But one should not forget about his exorbitant vanity and desire to constantly interfere in military matters. Field Marshal Count Schlieffen's instructions to the officers of the General Staff: "Do more, act less! Be bigger than you look! in any case, were not the motto of this power-hungry Gauleiter, on whose orders the innocent burgomaster Dr. Spielhagen was executed at the end of January.

Around February 20, Gauleiter Hanke demanded that the commandant of the fortress regularly report to him on the situation in Breslau. Hanke himself, in turn, transmitted this information to Bormann in Berlin. Needless to say, he tried to portray the appearance of vigorous activity. He believed that in Berlin they should have known about the state of affairs in the fortress only from his words. Goebbels praised the actions of his former subordinate Hanke:

"Hanke sent me an extremely dramatic and useful report from Breslau. It shows that he has achieved perfection in his work. Today he represents the most energetic National Socialist leader. The fighting turned Breslau into ruins. But the townspeople are desperately fighting for every inch of land. The Soviets shed an incredible amount of blood fighting for Breslau." Then Goebbels concluded: "If all our Gauleiters in the East were like Hanke and worked like Hanke, then our affairs would be better than they are in reality. Hanke is an outstanding figure among our Gauleiters operating in the east" ("Diaries", entry dated March 4, 1945).

At the same time, almost no one knew in what form this information was presented. Actually, the content of these broadcasts is hardly interesting. It makes sense to dwell on only one proposal of Gauleiter Hanke, which put the commandant of the fortress, General von Alphen, in a very uncomfortable position. It's about arrival.

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to the city of German paratroopers. Hanke himself considered the position of the city almost hopeless, and therefore asked Berlin to send a regiment of German paratroopers from Monte Cassino. The party official naively believed that these forces would be quite enough to break through the ring of the Soviet encirclement and "build bridges" with the territory held by Army Group Center. This request was only partly fulfilled. In Breslau, the German parachute battalion 1/26 was thrown over the "air bridge". It was because of this battalion that clouds began to gather over the head of General von Alphen. He even received a severe reprimand from the commander of Army Group Center.

What happened? It turned out that the paratrooper battalion was not fit to take part in the battles for Breslau. The headquarters of the fortress understood this very well, and therefore they considered it pointless to send this unit immediately into battle. The battalion itself was staffed by former pilots. He was armed only with small arms and faustpatrons, which, by the way, were already enough in the fortress. At the same time, the paratroopers had neither mortars nor machine guns intended for ground combat. Among other things, the battalion itself did not have rich combat experience. Maybe it was a good, but completely pointless division for Breslau. For this reason, the battalion was almost immediately sent to the reserve, where, along with other units, it had to be suitably armed and prepared for defensive battles. On duty, General von Alphen reported this to the headquarters of Army Group Center. From there almost immediately came the answer of the commander of the army group:

"The parachute battalion is a good part, and therefore I expect active actions from it in the near future."

The commandant of the fortress tried to explain that no one questions the personal qualities of the paratroopers, but their unsuitable weapons and lack of combat experience were undoubtedly a weak point. At the headquarters of Army Group Center, they did not begin to understand the situation and sent this information upstairs, to Berlin. As a result, a conflict broke out between Hermann Goering on the one hand and Albert Speer on the other. Neither side wanted to admit their guilt. The Imperial Minister of Armaments categorically disagreed with the conclusions about the poor armament of the battalion of German paratroopers.

The way out of this situation was found in the fact that Breslau was sent another paratrooper battalion. It was the 2nd Special Purpose Battalion "Mine", commanded by Captain Skau. He arrived in the besieged city on March 5, 1945, and after the reorganization of the 1/26 battalion, two full-fledged landing units arose in the fortress, which became an operational reserve.

In February 1945, the famous SA Obergruppenführer Herzog continued his activities to strengthen and develop the Volkssturm in Breslau. He tried to reorganize the inner life

cities in order to free up forces for fighting at the front. With the help of Major Count Seydlitz, the activities of the training and reserve battalion of the Volkssturm were established. Colonel Göllnitz was responsible for training the "recruits". Gradually, the number of Volkssturm in the fortress grew. When at the end of February it became finally clear that there was no hope of establishing a railway connection with the "mainland", it was decided to form a separate militia battalion from railway workers and depot workers. Many eyewitnesses emphasized that this unit, like no other, had a common, so to speak, "corporate" spirit. In addition, most railroad workers were already soldiers in the past, and therefore it took significantly less time to train them. As a result, the 74th Volkssturm Battalion, commanded by Pöch, turned out to be a valuable acquisition for the commandant of the fortress.

Separately, it is necessary to talk about the idea of creating a special armored train in Breslau. This idea belonged personally to General von Alphen. He instructed the future commander of the armored train, Oberleutnant of anti-aircraft artillery Perzel, to arrive at the FAMO enterprise and find the hulls of damaged tanks there. At least four buildings were found. Since there were no suitable tank guns in Breslau, the decision was made

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use the available 88-mm anti-aircraft guns, which had to be crossed with tank hulls and based on them to create some kind of armored train. As his staff, it was supposed to use the personnel of the anti-aircraft battery of the above-mentioned Oberleutnant Perzel. The reasons for the appearance of such an idea in the head of General von Alphen were quite simple. The fact is that the commandant of the fortress was a good specialist in the creation of armored trains and an expert in the tactics of conducting battles with their participation.

It was General von Alphen who instructed Oberleutnant Pörzel about the strengths and weaknesses of armored trains, about the basic tactics of their use. The commandant of the fortress himself never saw his offspring. The armored train was ready three weeks after von Alphen left Breslau.

In mid-February, Soviet troops began carrying out operations of a special type - these were propaganda activities. Ernst Hornig recalled them:

"It was psychological warfare, which we got to know well during the First World War, in 1918 on the western front in France. Then the propaganda made bets on leaflets. In 1918, leaflets were dropped on us: "Soldier, if you are going to the West, then think carefully - your grave is there." Now the propaganda was focused not only on the Wehrmacht and the Volkssturm, but also on the civilian population. On the night of February 16-17, Soviet planes littered the city with a sea of leaflets. One of the leaflets addressed to the Volkssturm read: "Before their death, the Nazis in animal horror drive you against the victorious Red Army." And then it was reported: "The Red Army does not fight against the civilian population, and if you leave the ranks of the Nazi army, you can work in peace. Those who turn their weapons against the victorious Red Army will be mercilessly destroyed. If you want to live and save your cities and villages from destruction, then take off your bandages, drop your weapons and go home. Note that any resistance to the Red Army means certain death for you. Life is guaranteed only to those who immediately renounce Hitler, who throw away their weapons and go home or surrender." In the next leaflet, the Russians addressed the German soldiers and officers: "The Red Army went deep into Upper Silesia, East Prussia and Pomerania. Hitler finally lost the war. But he - Hitler - knows how to prolong his power and life. To do this, he is ready to sacrifice the lives of hundreds of thousands of his soldiers. But still there are worthy people and respected generals who demand an immediate end to the war. And then it was reported about the call, which was supported by 50 German generals, led by Field Marshal Paulus and General of Artillery Seidlitz.

Many of his contemporaries paid tribute to the Soviet propagandists. The Germans noted that the leaflets were very skillfully composed, and the hopelessness of the situation was by no means an exaggeration. Many of the Germans found that the text contained in the leaflets was very accessible. Many of the soldiers read them. Despite the fact that no mass surrender was ever observed in Breslau, these leaflets played their psychological role. Many noted that only the fear of being sent to Siberia stopped them from surrendering.

Soviet propaganda, which became more and more active every day, did not always resort to "honest" methods. Once a uniform provocation was arranged. After the 9 o'clock news, the following information was transmitted on the German Radio frequency:

"And now a message for brave soldiers and comrades from Breslau. The time has come for your release! Several tank divisions broke through the enemy encirclement in the east. Hurry to the southern quarters of the city to shake hands with your liberators."

Before the masses of residents rushed to the southern borders of the city, where heavy artillery shelling began, the fortress headquarters managed to take the appropriate

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countermeasures. Now it is difficult to say how many people heard and believed in the information about the release of the city. First, there was no radio in the cellars where the civilian population was hiding. Most of the radios, as unnecessary, remained in the apartments. Secondly, the population has ceased to trust any official information. Thirdly, this message almost immediately flew around the military units of Breslau, but they did not budge, as they did not receive the appropriate order.

Hugo Ertung recalled this episode of the siege of Breslau, which took place on March 3:

"Yesterday, in the basement, they discussed for several hours information that the encirclement had been broken. But already in the afternoon, this information was refuted in a special issue of the serf newspaper. It claimed that it was a propaganda trick of the enemy."

Ernst Hornig added:

"The skepticism towards propaganda messages was so great that most people preferred to listen not to German, but to foreign radio stations."

Gradually the inhabitants of Breslau and the German soldiers revealed a certain rhythm in the Soviet attacks. Bombs were falling on the city early in the morning. In the first half of the day, artillery fire opened, which was replaced by raids by low-flying aircraft. Around noon, there was a pause, and people could appear on the street. In the evening and at night, bombardments were again carried out, but now Soviet aviation preferred to use incendiary bombs. In the evening, Soviet anti-aircraft artillery also came into action, the fire of which was accompanied by the use of several searchlights.

Dramatic and shocking were the events in the nursing home, the so-called "Flidner Building", which was located on Kaiser Wilhelm Street near the Hindenburg Square. Here, the sisters from Betanina cared for the elderly until the very end. When the Soviet troops approached a critical distance, everyone waited in vain for the evacuation. Some of the old people managed to get out of the house. With a heavy heart, the sisters were forced to leave the bedridden. The older sister Heidebrand recalled what happened next:

"When the enemy in the south approached the building, a Wehrmacht officer appeared and asked the two sisters who were there to leave the building, as it could burn down. Bertha's sister Nyde set off on a perilous journey to her mother's house with a few old people. Another sister, Anna

Lausch, on the orders of the officer, was to pour some kind of liquid into a glass for the hopelessly ill. None of the old people resisted.

It turned out that there was poison in the glass. This example clearly shows that the National Socialist ideology subjugated many officers of the Wehrmacht. It was a continuation of the inhuman practice of euthanasia, which in the Third Reich was applied to people with mental retardation. This time, helpless old people became the victims of politics.

The situation of the civilian population began to worsen day by day. Krause recalled:

"We went without water for many days. It was not possible to get to the column, since anyone who happened to be there could become a victim of Russian snipers. We had some supplies of water at home to wash, drink and sometimes wash the dishes ... despite all these difficulties, we tried to live as well as possible under those conditions. Daughter Berbel played with her teddy bear and sometimes skillfully made new lamps from candle ends. Since there were very few candles, in most cases we sat in total darkness. But if a strong one began

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shelling, then we lit a candle and felt more confident in this weak lighting in our underground shelter ... On February 28, when the Russians were six houses away from our shelter, our basement turned into a military camp. Between 10 and 15 soldiers slept in our cellar every day. Most of them were very young people. They were constantly harassed by "watchdogs" (army police) who were constantly hunting for people in order to send them to the front and continue the senseless defense of Breslau. In addition, the party organs drove all the people to the construction of barricades. In the end, I also had to go to Hardenberg Straße to participate in earthworks. At that moment, some 300 meters separated the Russians from the cuirassier barracks. When they saw a crowd of people who were building fortifications, fire was opened on them. People in panic fled to the surrounding cellars. There were soldiers there who did not understand the recklessness of the decision to send civilians to work right under the nose of the enemy. When four soldiers passed by the door, I tried to run with them. They shouted at me to duck and keep a meter away from them. We looked out from one of the barricades, when suddenly one soldier suddenly cried out: "Quickly into the house, now he will start shooting

"Orgbn Stalin"22!

Now I sat with the soldiers in the corner of a dilapidated house until the shelling stopped. After that we ran to the corner of Lorraine Street and Kaiser Wilhelm Street. To get home, I had to cross Kaiser Wilhelm Street. Everyone who wanted to survive had to run separately. The only thing I had to rely on was the words of the prayer: "Lord, save and protect!". Finally, I ended up in the basement of the house, where, thank God, I found Berbel safe and sound."

On February 20, the summary of the High Command of the Wehrmacht reported:

"The defenders of Breslau were able to beat off enemy attacks on the southwestern and eastern fronts."

What a cruel reality was hidden behind these mean lines can be judged from the memoirs of Hugo Ertung:

"In the evening, Sh. and I began to move further towards the city center. The shelling began to weaken, but houses were on fire in all the streets. Crack and soot everywhere. Fire breaks out from under the rafters and windows of houses. We go around huge funnels. The sanitary points that we find are abandoned by everyone. In the military hospital on Franz Selde Square, Dr. Franz took care of us, but his sanitation station was also disbanded. In the end, dead tired, we trudge on through the streets,

engulfed in fires. In the middle of Höfchenstrasse, we come across a firing gun. In the end, we find ourselves in the basement of the House of Actors (Garten Strasse), which houses a functioning sanitary facility. A strange feeling comes over me. I am in the basement of the house with which I have the warmest memories. It was here in 1942 that we celebrated the 80th birthday of Gerhardt Hauptmann. I slept for 17 hours in a row in the frozen basement of the House of Actors.

Paul Peikert recalled the events of February 28 in the following way:

"Today, the flow of refugees from the southern districts of the city flooded the north and the districts along the banks of the Oder. Now all the southern outskirts, from the main station to the Odertor station, are being evacuated by force. The evacuation is carried out by Waffen-SS soldiers with rare cynicism and cruelty. The columns of people look pathetic. Most of them are elderly people. While the columns followed the streets, at 1530 hours an enemy air raid began. The bombardment intensified every minute. Trams had to stop their movement. Virtually every

22 The Germans called the "Katyushas" the "Stalin's Orgbnom".

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the refugee area was bombed." The ability to survive in this environment is described by one of Breslau's employees:

"For a while, I lived with several other people on Kronprinzstrasse in the gatekeeper's apartment. In one part of the apartment - men, in the other - women. In the end, there were 17 of us there. Something else was amazing! Each, after completing their own affairs, was sent to build barricades or an airstrip. Since our office, and with it the financial department, closed in January, Greta and I had to be involved in the construction of the runway. Earlier, I had already been released from construction duty as a valuable worker. Suddenly, an announcement appeared in the newspapers that all employees of the imperial insurance offices who remained in the fortress were to report to special collection points. No sooner said than done. I took Greta along with me ... But in the end we spent more time sitting in the basements than actually working. Air raids intensified every day. We went to work not without internal horror. A lot of planes circled over our heads. Fires devastated the city. We were forced to watch helplessly as so many people perished. The wounded moaned piteously. They had to be tied up. In addition, they needed a kind word and comfort. But it was more difficult to calm the crazy. We have seen mountains of corpses and experienced everything that brutal war brings. But at the same time, we had to wash ourselves and at least get some sleep. The front was on our heels. Somewhere behind Stalin's organs roared. The Russians were already in Kaiser Wilhelm Square. We spent most of our time in the cellar. Meanwhile, our apartment was destroyed by shells. The house was in danger of collapsing. In the basement we were on the verge of death, we were saved by providence itself. After eating, we left him, and a few seconds later he was hit by a shell. For the first time in our lives, we were homeless.

We found shelter in a neighboring house on the corner of Brandenburg Street, where four families were already hiding from shelling. There we placed our modest belongings. The first night in this basement seemed to us the most terrible. There was a continuous air raid. We did not know how to get bread during the day, and what we would eat the next day. But the next night we were forcibly evacuated. In our basement, the soldiers were supposed to fight a defensive battle. The rest of the inhabitants moved west along Brandenburg Street until they found themselves in Mauritius Square. One of the men who ended up in our community had the key to a colleague's apartment, which was located on Monastyrskaya Street. The colleague himself left Breslau back in January, so the apartment was empty. At midnight we dragged our carts there. Everywhere reigned the same thing - fear. The same dangers awaited people everywhere. We seven began to live in

small apartment. In fact, we led a "gypsy nomadic life." But this did not prevent us from sometimes experiencing moments of joy. We lived in an abandoned apartment for about two weeks. Shell explosions destroyed the dwellings to the right and left of us. It became unsafe to live there, and we once again left our shelter ... We ended up on Alexander Strasse. There Greta was involved in the construction of barricades. I presented all my certificates, and I was reluctantly sent to work in the army office. It was located in one of the houses on Monastyrskaya Street. Like mice, girls constantly emerged from the surrounding cellars. Our morale was waning. The path to the office became more and more difficult to overcome each time. It was terrible. The Russians were already fighting on Ofener Strasse. Houses were on fire, a constant shower of shells and bombs fell. Suddenly we left Alexander-strasse. Somehow, around one in the morning, under heavy artillery fire, we gathered our belongings and moved forward. The night was clear, but the sky was blood red. Safe and sound, we reached our destination. We were again "provided" with an apartment. The previous owners abandoned her. Every day we had to fill the windows with cardboard, but each close gap brought them out again and again. We had to get a construction job. Everyone worked there - both old and

young

Party officials had the only power over us. Every day we had to arrive at Linden Park to get food stamps. For this we needed

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build an airstrip. The quarter was unceremoniously razed to the ground. This is the only way planes could take off from here. Every day, Greta, with hundreds of other people, made her way here. Her working clothes were boots, a jacket and a scarf. All those who worked here were on the verge of despair. The enemy knew where we were concentrated, and therefore conducted intensified artillery fire on this area. At these moments, one could only fall and pray. There were no hiding places in the vicinity. During these works, Greta broke her ribs, damaged her liver and spleen. But even when she was sick, she was forced to throw furniture out of the windows and wash clothes for some institutions. On the streets, this fate awaited almost everyone.

The dual power (on the one hand, General von Alphen as the commandant of the fortress, on the other, Gauleiter Hanke as the imperial commissar for defense) only worsened the position of Breslau. Largely because the principles of von Alphen and Hanke were fundamentally different from each other, just as the positions of General von Alphen and Schörner were fundamentally different from each other. This became apparent when the commandant of the fortress informed the commander of Army Group Center about the lack of ammunition in Breslau. Von Alphen himself recalled:

"Instead of ammunition, a hail of orders and instructions rained down. One of them sounded like this: "The number of simulators is frighteningly increasing every day. Therefore, the command of the combined arms formations must give an order that not a single soldier without the appropriate written permission could appear in the rear. All those who violate this order must be shot at place".

The execution of this order in Breslau would mean the implementation of uniform terror. For this reason, General von Alphen refused to carry out this order.

On February 24, 1945, the Nazi Party celebrated one of its anniversaries - 25 years since the adoption of the NSDAP program. On this day, Hitler and Gauleiter Hanke exchanged congratulatory radiograms. Hitler's radiogram read, in part:

"I wish you and your people to keep faith in the future of our people and fight until the final victory."

In response, Hanke promised to "strictly follow National Socialist principles." A few days later, on March 3, 1945, Hanke made an address in the style of Goebbels, which was broadcast on German radio. He urged all Germans to believe in victory, which

should have come, among other things, "thanks to the proven fighters from the East and the defenders of Breslau." On the same day, Commandant von Alphen signed an order to prevent the spread of "defeatist rumors". The order itself was called "Attention! Enemy propaganda.

Meanwhile, on February 23, 1945, an order came to the fortress headquarters quite unexpectedly:

"In order to guarantee the supply of Breslau by air even in the face of the loss of the Gandau airfield, by order of the Führer, it is necessary to immediately begin preparations for the construction of an airfield inside the city. The commandant of the fortress is obliged to inform about the proposed location of this airfield and the approximate time of the start of work on its construction.

It must be clarified that General von Alphen considered this possibility as early as the beginning of February 1945. He looked at the so-called Frisian Meadow and the stadium, located east of Scheitniger Park, as the proposed sites for the construction of the "internal" airfield. But time was lost, von Alphen's predecessor did almost nothing for a whole month to carry out this project. Under the conditions of the blockade of Breslau, when almost all available forces were thrown either to participate in defensive battles or to build fortifications, von Alphen decided to postpone the "question of an internal airfield." At the end of February, this issue was entrusted to Lieutenant Colonel von Friedeburg, as

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a representative of the Luftwaffe, and a city building adviser. They conducted reconnaissance on the ground, and came to very disappointing conclusions for von Alphen. The only place where it was possible to create an airfield was located opposite the Frisian meadow. It was possible to build runways with a length of at least 1300 meters only on the Kaiser Straße running from the southwest to the northeast. To obtain the width of the lanes necessary for landing transport aircraft, it was necessary to carry out considerable construction work. In particular, it was necessary to remove the street lamps and tram wires. In addition, it was necessary to remove all the trees and demolish most of the houses, including the Lutheran church, which framed the Kaiser Straße on both sides. Specialists made the necessary calculations: how much explosives, tools, vehicles, skilled workers were required. As a result, it turned out that both projects to create an "internal" airfield (Friesian Meadow and Kaiser Strasse) under the siege of the city were simply unrealistic. In addition, Colonel von Friedeburg, as a pilot, emphasized one feature of the project on Kaiser Strasse. He competently stated that in the event of the creation of runways in the area, aircraft could only enter them with a southwesterly or northeasterly wind. For this reason, he recommended to General von Alphen to focus his attention on the Frisian Meadow. All this information and substantiation of the conclusions drawn were sent upstairs. The reaction to them was very violent. At his headquarters, Hitler made one voluntarist decision after another. Order arrived:

"The construction of the inner city airfield was entrusted to Gauleiter Hanke. The commandant of the fortress is obliged to provide him with the necessary specialists and explosives. substances."

The tone of such an order brought to mind von Alphen's memory of the situation when in 1938 there was a conflict between Hitler and the inspector of fortresses, who presented his thoughts on the inexpediency of building the Siegfried Line.

Breslau's clergy tried to oppose the creation of an airstrip on Kaiser Straße, since during the expansion of the street the Evangelical and Catholic churches were to be destroyed. But all their efforts were in vain.

Under these conditions, two officers arrived in Breslau one after the other with an order from Colonel General Schörner. The order applied not only to the commandant of the fortress, but to the entire headquarters. And therefore

it was very strange that these two officers first visited Gauleiter Hanke, who was personally handed the papers (only copies of them were handed over to General von Alphen himself). It is significant that the letter did not contain a word about the command of the fortress, while Hanke expressed gratitude for the measures he had taken. One got the impression that the headquarters of Army Group Center really believed that the Gauleiter was the central figure in the defense of Breslau. It is possible that this was the result of Hanke's radio communication with Berlin. In any case, General von Alphen was distrusted. The fortress of Breslau was to have a new commandant. Von Alphen himself recalled on this occasion:

"Such neglect was very nerve-wracking. The enemy and fire, fires and bombs were not able to inflict such damage, since they could be fought openly. They could be resisted. But I had no remedy for the poison of mistrust."

On the evening of March 5, 1945, a new commandant of the fortress, General Niehof, arrived in Breslau. He was an old friend of General von Alphen. Both of them studied in 1921-1922 at the Munich infantry school. Niehof immediately assessed the situation in Breslau. General von Alphen himself asked his immediate superior, the commander of the 17th Army, General Schultz, to stay in the city for several days in order to transfer all affairs

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Niehof. The former commandant went forward. As a result, the first week of March 1945 in Breslau was somewhat reminiscent of ancient Rome, when two consuls alternately ruled there. Until March 8, Alphen continued to go about his business, dedicating General Niehoff to them. On March 9, the new commandant came into his own. Now he himself had to bear the burden of responsibility for the besieged city. He himself had no illusions about his fate. On the eve of his departure to Breslau, General Schultz gave him an assessment that came from the mouth of Colonel-General Schörner:

"In the south of Breslau, the enemy was able to penetrate deep into the territory of the city with large forces. If the situation at the front does not change radically, then the fall of the fortress is a matter of several days, and possibly even several hours.

If Schörner, as commander of Army Group Center, really held this point of view, then sending General Niehof to Breslau was a formal death sentence. In this regard, it seemed strange that by the time General Niehoff took office, Breslau continued to successfully defend himself, although the indicated "several days, and possibly even several hours" had long since expired.

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Chapter 5

General Niehof was the commander of the 371st Infantry Division, which was recreated after the complete destruction near Stalingrad, which by the beginning of 1945 was part of the 17th Army. By the time the winter general offensive of the Red Army began, the left flank covered the southern bank of the Upper Vistula. This explains the fact that the division did not take on the full power of the strike of the Soviet troops. The division, commanded by Niehof, was able to withstand several offensives by the insignificant forces of the Soviet army. After that, she received an order to retreat, since the bulk of the advancing Soviet troops had already advanced far to the west by that time. As a result, the 371st division was unable to participate in the defense of Krakow (which was considered its main task), since by the time of its retreat it had already been taken by units of the Red Army.

Now the main task of the division was to block the path of Soviet troops further to the west. The division itself managed to withstand the blow of Soviet tanks, which was inflicted in

Krenau²³, located between Krakow and Auschwitz. When, by the beginning of February 1945, it was necessary to evade the battles imposed on the Red Army in Upper Silesia, General Niehof, together with his division, defended the Ratibor-Kozel front section.

General Hermann Niehof himself did not immediately begin to be considered as the new commandant of the Breslau fortress. At first, Schörner scheduled General Greiner for this role. However, due to a serious illness, he could not cope with this task. Only after that the choice was stopped on Herman Niehoff. The telegram informing the general of his new appointment is of particular interest, since it states that his functions went far beyond the commanding general. Here are excerpts from it:

"March 2, 1945, 9 hours 15 minutes

Mr Lieutenant General Niehoff.

In accordance with the order ... I bring to the attention of Mr. General that you, at the suggestion of Colonel-General Schörner, will carry out a new and very difficult task. When it is carried out, your functions will go beyond the scope of the commanding general "

General Niehoff, who was appointed commandant of Breslau, actually became a hostage to the situation. Later, he was repeatedly told that the situation in Breslau was much more advantageous than that of many units of the Wehrmacht that were outside the encirclement. In addition, it was at that very moment that the "real" special-purpose paratrooper battalion "Shakht" was sent to the city, which was supposed to become a valuable reserve, designed to perform the most difficult tasks.

Niehof's first task was to mend relations with Gauleiter Hanke. It was necessary to restore as quickly as possible the undermined trust between the party leadership and the military command. To complete this task, General Niehof received some "help" from the command of Army Group Center. He was promised to release the city, which was supposed to instill hope in the soldiers and civilians. In Breslau, this was immediately announced by two generals: von Alphen and Niehof. von Alfen, who was serving on the "mainland", General Niehof said in farewell that to complete this difficult task, his hands were untied. At the same time, von Alphen himself, who, even without accurate information, presented a fairly accurate picture of the balance of power, reacted with some skepticism to the allegations that the release of Breslau was not far off. At the same time, Niehof himself, who announced such a possibility, considered it his personal duty to keep this word. However, the German generals could more than once be convinced in practice that promises to release the encircled military group were not always kept (Stalingrad and Budapest could be cited as an example). Niehof himself could doubt the reality of such promises, if only because of the deadlines that

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were voiced by Colonel-General Schörner. The same person stated the following:

"If you can hold Breslau for at least three or four days, then Schörner will break through to you and lend a helping hand."

Niehof had already been commandant of the fortress for a whole week (the promised three or four days had long passed), but there was no sign outside that the city was supposed to be released. As a result, Niehof asked the command of the 17th Army, to which the Breslau garrison was formally subordinate, to give more accurate calculations. This time it was said that the period for which Breslau was to be held was four weeks. It was alleged that Colonel-General Schörner was already completing the development of a plan to release Breslau, for which, on the front, Strehlen -

Münsterberg was concentrated by a powerful German military group. She had to not only break through the encirclement around Breslau, but also go to the rear of the Soviet troops who were advancing on Berlin. Due to the limited capabilities of the Germans on the Eastern Front, such a plan was more of a fantastic dream than a real possibility. When the allotted four weeks expired, the command of the 17th Army recommended General Niehof to hold out for another six weeks!

The controversial promise to release Breslau already added to the burden that had been placed on the shoulders of General Niehoff. He himself emphasized that not everyone was able to realize it. In this regard, the question seems appropriate: did the High Command and the command of Army Group Center not make it too difficult for the three commanders of the Breslau fortress who succeeded each other to carry out the already not very easy task?

The first commandant was denied authority and the necessary funds. They disdainfully treated the proposals of the second commandant - they refused to trust General von Alphen. Promises given to the third commandant were not kept. Niehof himself was well aware that the trust in him from the soldiers and the civilian population was at stake. In addition, there was no need to write off the personal factor, which applied not so much to the defenders of Breslau as a whole, but to the Gauleiter and the Reich Commissioner for Defense Hanke. For the sake of justice, let's say that Hanke himself did not interfere in purely military matters. It would be erroneous to assume that he was able to pin General von Alphen to the wall. Actually, Hanke managed to remove the predecessor of General Niehoff thanks to cunning intrigues and slander. General Niehof did not want to repeat the path of his army comrade, and therefore immediately tried to neutralize Hanke. It was a very risky undertaking. On the one hand, General Niehof, at least formally, had to maintain good relations with Gauleiter Hanke. But on the other hand, the ambitious Gauleiter, in his radiograms addressed to the Reich Chancellery to Bormann, described the "prosperous" position of Breslau, which, naturally, was exclusively his "merit". As a result, more than the wrong opinion was formed in Berlin about the state of affairs in the fortress. If things were going so well in the fortress, then why should she help? It took General Niehof a great deal of diplomatic talent in order to clearly define the competence of the parties during the first meeting in Gauleiter Hank. Niehof had already been instructed by General von Alphen that not a single word of the Gauleiter could be trusted. Hanke, at the beginning of February 1945, declared to the commandant of the fortress:

"I am the Gauleiter of Silesia, but by no means the Gauleiter of Breslau. As Gauleiter of Silesia, most of my assignments are outside the city limits. But in order not to set a bad example for people, I decided to stay in the fortress. In fact, I am a person without rights. You can count on me completely in the future."

These words were one sheer hypocrisy. In order to unequivocally show who was the master in the house, General Niehof demanded that the Gauleiter surrender a powerful radio station - an event that had to be carried out from the very beginning of the siege of Breslau.

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If we talk about the general situation of the city, then first of all it is necessary to consider the situation on the "southern" front. From February 23 to March 7, the Mora and Besslein regiments left only insignificant territories during the fighting. The positions of the 609th division, on the contrary, even strengthened. This military formation held its positions along the line Hospital Hanke - Stein Strasse - Church of the Holy Spirit - St. Bernardine Cemetery - Ole Valley - Pirsham. Despite the fact that the positions here were quite reliable, and the military units themselves gained considerable combat experience, General Niehof decided to pay increased attention to the southern theater of operations. He decided to send more weapons here in order to repel any Soviet attacks at the first opportunity. The words of the general became the general principle of fighting on the "southern" front:

"Dispersion, Deep Separation, Reserves".

Concern about maintaining the combat power of the encircled garrison became almost the No. 1 task for General Niehoff. This is not surprising, since over time the number of losses in the German units increased, which had to be replenished at the expense of the inhabitants of Breslau. As a result, the general paid no less attention to the activities of Herzog and Göllnitz. The structure they created was focused primarily on the training of junior commanders, the proportion of losses among which during the battles was always higher. Since there were almost no differences between the front and the rear proper in the fortress, the city was constantly combed in search of combat-ready men. Such "recruitment" took place according to plan. Civilians preferred not to be sent immediately into battle. To begin with, they had to undergo at least a short-term training, which was supposed to introduce them to the basics of street fighting tactics. Often, many men who had previously worked in the civilian sector volunteered to go to the front.

However, the situation did not look so idealistic. In Guido Knopp's book "Hitler's Children" there are several testimonies about how the recruitment to the Volkssturm battalions, staffed by teenagers from the Hitler Youth, took place.

Christian Lüdke recalled the day he joined the defenders-militia:

"I came to my mother and said that I have now become a soldier. "God, they've already started taking the kids!" - she exclaimed. A week later, on my birthday, the order came. We were to be transferred to another sector of the front. It was my birthday so my friend and I decided to go there the next morning. In the morning we went there, but a guard was waiting for us near the bridge. The officer said: "Lyudka, you are under arrest. You are not worthy to wear a German uniform." They ripped off my uniform jacket."

This case was personally handled by the head of the Hitler Youth in Breslau, Herbert Hirsch. At a time when the city was trembling from bursts of enemy shells, is it possible to mitigate the punishment of Lyudka and his comrade?

"They came to me and said: "We want to consider your behavior recklessly stupid and thereby save you from being shot. You will receive twenty-five blows with a stick. Grit your teeth and be patient! After the tenth strike, I lost consciousness. After the execution, the head of the Hitler Youth told me: "Well, young man, go to the front and distinguish yourself there. I hope I will soon be able to attach an iron cross to your uniform."

This absurdity took place against the backdrop of the destruction of the city. Ludka was again entrusted with the high honor of dying for the "Führer and the fatherland." Many others who lagged behind their own were less fortunate. They were just shot.

The front had long gone to the west, and numerous Soviet formations could not take the city in any way. By mid-February, when the city was completely surrounded, it was defended by 40,000 defenders. The Red Army had to fight to take every house, every street, every floor. Fires painted the night clouds scarlet. The Gandau airfield was the main target of Soviet attacks. With its loss, all communication between the Nazis and the outside world was interrupted.

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Churches were turned into fortifications, cemeteries became battlefields, gravestones served as material for erecting barricades.

The whole city turned into a complete hell. In the center of it, an improvised airfield was hastily equipped. For many it was the hope of evacuation, for others it was a symbol of ultimate victory. All the youth of the city joined the Wehrmacht, the Volkssturm and the "Hitler Youth Regimental Group". It was organized by the head of the local Hitler Youth, Hirsch.

The group consisted of two battalions with a total strength of 1000 people. They were well armed and subordinated to experienced non-commissioned officers. In fierce attacks, they managed to recapture the Pöpelwitz station and the Rutger factories from the enemy. The townspeople called the corner of Kaiser-Wilhelm and Auguststrasse streets "Hitlerjugendeck", "Hitler Youth Corner".

Fierce resistance resulted in heavy losses among the juvenile soldiers. Half of the members of the city's Hitler Youth organization were killed in street fighting. Hundreds of them remained lying on the positions of the main defensive line in the south of the city in the area of the railway

embankments.

Manfred Preusner was wounded while attacking Soviet positions.

"During a break, a huge sergeant major came up to me with a pistol in his hand and asked: "What is the matter with you? I replied that I had been wounded by shrapnel. He saw the blood come out. I was allowed to go down to the basement. Others also wanted to rest in the basement. However, the sergeant major with a pistol in his hand drove them back to their positions, to this damned railway embankment.

Roman Schaeffer spoke about what awaited them on the main defensive line:

"The Russians were lying on top of the embankment, and we had to push them back over the embankment. Can you imagine how they lay up there and shot through the whole space with machine guns? How many people were put there! This is pure stupidity."

Christian Ludke, who was punished with sticks for unauthorized absence from the unit, was in the same defense sector:

"We had to wage a hopeless struggle. We only had time to count our losses. Many were crying not because of injuries, but because of fear."

In his official opinion, the Reich could only admire the military aspect of this human tragedy. "Relying on the courageous will to resist and proven combat courage, on the full support of the fatherland and the deep conviction to fight to the end, we will hold the fortress until the turning point in the war," said the command of the encircled group. However, despite the boastful military propaganda, the "iron" discipline in the city gradually weakened.

Street fighting instilled fear not only in the defenders of Breslau, but also in Soviet soldiers. One could probably write a whole volume about the tactics of street fighting, their features and difficulties. But in this book we will confine ourselves to a few remarks. The main difficulty for the Germans was that the training of soldiers was carried out in critical conditions. As a result, most of the German units on the defensive could be called cohesive military units with a very big stretch. Soviet troops, in fact, attacked hastily assembled groups that did not have time to undergo proper training. Meanwhile, in the southern theater of operations, street fighting began on February 20, 1945.

The Germans tried to defend their defenses by placing strongholds in the corner houses... As a result, it was precisely these buildings that were targeted by a flurry of fire from Soviet anti-tank guns and tanks carefully making their way along the streets. General Niehof himself noted that only the fires that arose from the explosions of numerous shells and bombs were worse than the Soviet troops:

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"At first, our soldiers were literally burned alive."

The German command decided to find a way out of the situation in the use of hand-held fire extinguishers, of which there were a sufficient number in industrial Breslau. In addition, teenagers from the Hitler Youth were instructed to find means for fire extinguishing in the city. During such raids, about a hundred Minimax fire-extinguishing balloon installations were found,

who were immediately sent to the front line. It should be noted right away that with the help of "Minimax" it was possible to successfully extinguish a small, just starting fire, but by no means a flame that engulfed the whole house. The fact that fires were a constant headache for the commandant of the fortress is evidenced by at least one fact. General Niehof decided to seek advice from one of the professors at the Technical University of Breslau. He, in turn, recommended to the general to use one chemical substance, which was stored in abundance in the northern part of the city in large containers, to extinguish fires. But at the same time, the professor warned that this chemical had one side effect - when it was used, clouds of chloroform arose. As a result, it was decided to again attract teenagers from the Hitler Youth. They packaged chemicals in thousands of beer bottles, which other teenagers delivered to the battlefields. But it was clear to everyone that this was only an auxiliary tool that was not able to cope with fires in general. And the use of fire brigades in places of street fighting seemed completely impossible.

In the absence of incendiary shells from the Germans, they could not answer the Soviet troops with the same coin. But in late February, the Germans began to use a special tactic that not only allowed them to increase their firepower, but also proved effective against Soviet incendiary shells and bombs. It was first tested during the fighting near the building of the railway directorate. The Germans began to deliberately set fire to buildings that were planned to be handed over to the Red Army. In addition, the outer and inner walls of the corner buildings were undermined. As a result, the stone ruins were harder to set on fire, but at the same time, they were ideal hiding places for Faustniks and machine gun nests.

Niehof wrote in his memoirs of this tactic:

"At first glance, such measures were an expression of an aimless thirst for destruction, but in fact they were a prerequisite for more successful defensive battles."

It is hardly worth describing in detail that all the burned-out houses ended up at the disposal of the Soviet troops, while entire blocks were located inside the city.

The end of February - the beginning of March was also marked by the fact that the Germans used several technical "innovations" during the fighting. They were all as simple as they were effective. We must immediately make a reservation that a large number of 88-mm anti-aircraft guns turned out to be in Breslau, which could not be said about the ammunition for this artillery. Lieutenant Colonel More considered it expedient to establish cooperation between his regiment and the sappers of Major Hameister. First of all, this concerned the erection of barricades on the front line. At a certain distance from the battle line, special "secret" barricades were erected, which were based on 88-mm anti-aircraft guns, which were very effective even against Soviet tanks. When a small part of the territory was left and the Soviet troops were approaching, several cannon shots were suddenly fired from a similar barricade. In almost all cases, the units of the Red Army received considerable damage. For the most part, the Germans preferred to knock out Soviet anti-tank guns. Such tactics, subject to the simultaneous use of mortars and launchers such as the Faustpatron or Panzerschreck, proved to be very effective. At least the numbers speak for themselves. In two weeks of fighting Mora's regiment was able to destroy about a hundred Soviet anti-tank guns.

In the battles on the "southern" front, a company of tank destroyers also proved itself very successfully. Again, it was mainly used against the guns of the Red Army. Lieutenant Hartman, commander of the assault gun, reported the following:

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"We were mainly used against Russian anti-tank guns, which perfectly shot through all the streets at any time of the day or night. The sound of the shot, which resembled the crack of a whip, in the space enclosed by the buildings of the houses, evoked the feeling that the gun was somewhere

then very close, which very much got on the nerves of our soldiers. To fight the Russian guns, I came up with a special tactic. To begin with, I sought to find out the location of at least one anti-tank gun. In most cases, this was by no means the easiest task, since it was easy to make a mistake in the noise of many shots. If I managed to peek around someone's corner or use a telescopic tube, then I could tell my gunner exactly where to fire. Then we fired up our assault gun and, turning at full speed around the corner, sent a projectile along the street. Not a single Russian had time or dared to fire a shot at our assault vehicle. As a result, we managed to knock out an enemy anti-tank gun. Although I happened to be mistaken with the definition of the place where the gun was located. However, the Soviets had little use for this. The blast wave from our projectile blew off the camouflage of the Russian gun, which was usually made of straw, without any problems. We were able to achieve our first successes at the corner of Stein- and Halle Strasse, where the positions of the 609th division passed. Krish's company, which fought in this area, was very grateful for our help. During these battles, unfortunately, one of the RP tanks was lost, which could not cross the trench stretching along Steinstrasse. But even under these conditions, the tankers were able to beat the anti-tank gun, which was located between Cretius and Helmut Strasse. However, this was the only loss we suffered in Breslau from enemy anti-tank guns. At that moment, we were crossing a pit, and a caterpillar broke on my assault gun. I couldn't help it. In the repair of the self-propelled unit, even Major Schultz helped us, who appeared from the basement, all stained with fumes.

The burnt-out ruins of houses posed a considerable danger to those who fought in them. If we were talking about the Germans, then first of all the threat arose when Soviet artillery fired on the remains of buildings with large-caliber shells with delayed fuses. A hit and an explosion from such a projectile threatened to bury more than one German under the clouds. For this very reason, the defenders of Breslau preferred to pre-explode the burned-out houses themselves in order to use them for defense. And vice versa, the boxes of houses that were supposed to be handed over to the Red Army were left alone, thereby increasing the likelihood of Soviet soldiers being buried under their rubble. Gradually, the Germans began to undermine even the basements of destroyed houses. As Colonel Reinkober, commander of one of the regiments of the 609th division, recalled:

"The failures of cellars stretched along all the streets. As a result, a dense web of trenches and pits gradually arose, which stretched to the very front line The units were satisfied with the new fortification. Its undeniable advantages quickly became clear. Our losses began to decline. Through these "channels" it was possible to bring up reserves, bring ammunition and provisions, carry the wounded to the rear.

In addition, undermining the destroyed houses allowed the German artillery to conduct a more targeted fire.

Often in Breslau, the most common household items were used for disguise: carpets, curtains, lambrequins. Several successively stretched carpets along the street failures allowed the Germans to move around, in fact, remaining unnoticed by Soviet observers. Or, on the contrary, such carpets could indicate a false direction of movement, thereby disorienting the Red Army soldiers.

In street fighting, the use of a heavy 150-millimeter gun was very effective. Unfortunately for the Germans, the number of shells for this type of gun was very limited. As a result, they were placed at the disposal of the SS regiment.

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Bessleya. But the SS themselves preferred to keep them in reserve. It was planned to use this formidable weapon in the most critical situation. If we talk about Besslein's regiment, then

after a successful operation in Peiskerwitz and the defense of the airfield in Gandau, it earned a certain fame not only among the Germans, but also among the Red Army. When he was transferred from the "southern" to the "western" front, no one doubted that the SS regiment had a difficult task to perform. The SS men could not be denied some outrageousness. To a new destination, they moved with marching steps with songs. Needless to say, this concerned only those streets that were not shot through by Soviet artillery. At the same time, two companies of the Besslein regiment were dressed in steel helmets, one company in hats that were known as "Cox", and another company in specific headdresses that resembled cylinders. Appearing on the front line, the SS men with some bravado hung out a banner that was noticeable to Soviet soldiers: "The SS regiment of Besslein will fight here!". However, Mora's regiment, which was in these positions, fought in defensive battles no less fiercely. Sometimes it seemed that the German military formations competed with each other in their desperation and heroism. The 609th division, located to the left of the SS regiment, did not retreat a single meter during these battles. There were striking examples in Besslein's regiment. As such, one could cite the commander of one of the companies by the name of Budka. His unit held the building of the land insurance office, which was located on Augusta Street. A fire raged in the basement of the office, and the building itself was a heap of ruins, in which there was unbearable heat. Most of the soldiers, like Budka himself, were forced to strip to the waist and fight bare-chested. Regularly one of the soldiers was sent for water, which was poured over the defending SS men. That was the only way to deal with the unbearable heat.

The increase in the effectiveness of German firepower on the "southern" front by that time was largely achieved by placing heavy anti-tank guns in the cellars of corner houses at the crossroads of the fortress. The commander of the fortress artillery sent three batteries to this sector of the front. They were equipped with captured Soviet 76.2 mm anti-tank guns, which were powerful weapons. Usually, German tankers could verify the validity of this statement. But in Breslau, the "Russian" guns turned out to be directed against Soviet tanks. Shooting through the streets from cover almost to their entire length, these guns could kill in the bud any incipient Soviet attack.

The war was not complete without innovations. In order to accurately and successfully throw hand grenades at the Red Army soldiers who were hiding behind dilapidated walls, two German units almost simultaneously, but independently of each other, invented a special device. It was very reminiscent of ancient Roman weapons, so it would be more correct to call it a "catapult for hand grenades." At first, the catapult was built by teenagers from the Hitler Youth, who held the corner of Augusta and Emperor Wilhelm streets. The device threw guarantors in a very steep arc. The trajectory of their flight was so unexpected for the Red Army that for a long time they could not understand who and how was throwing hand grenades at their positions. Sometimes it felt like they were falling straight out of the sky. Later, something similar appeared in More's regiment. There, the device was called a "throwing machine."

During street fighting, German sappers discovered that damage could be done to Red Army units by blowing up buildings when they were occupied by Soviet soldiers. The commander of the sapper battalion of the 609th division, Captain Roter, described this tactic as follows:

"The explosions were effective only when they were carried out directly near the enemy. Prudently, a special cargo was delivered to the houses on the front line. It usually consisted of bombs, or most often two cylinders of hydrogen, either acetylene or oxygen. A special intermediate charge was attached to these cylinders. This cargo was usually located near the basement, which the enemy would certainly have used when occupying the house. In addition, the houses that were on the front line were "mined", and there was a possibility of their capture. Usually the cargo was hidden under coal and other

rubbish that could be stored in the basement. The explosion was carried out through electrical wires that ran through the basement along telephone wells for a distance of approximately 200 meters from the house. At the beginning of April, parts of our division laid down approximately 200 pieces of such cargo. The most laborious and time-consuming process was the laying of the cable, for which we usually used signalmen. Sometimes, in order to disguise the cargo, we had to bring 50 or more kilograms of coal or coke. But this tactic was very effective - it had a shocking effect on the enemy. So, for example, a six-story house took shape in a matter of seconds.

Separately, it is necessary to consider the fierce defensive battles waged by the 609th division. Let us quote the report that was written by Colonel Reinkober and his first assistant, Major Mooshacke:

"The main places of fighting throughout March and April were the Hanke Hospital, the Church of the Holy Spirit, the cemetery of St. Bernardine and the courtyard of the first tram depot. Again and again, fighting broke out over the school located north of Steinstrasse, which was a compact, modern building made of concrete, which was destroyed by enemy anti-tank guns. The fighting for this stone school, which was held by the 1st battalion of the Reinkober regiment (commander - captain Schmidt), did not stop even at night. After a powerful artillery preparation with numerous guns, the enemy again and again tried to penetrate the school from the buildings located on the opposite side of the street. The Russians were either in the basement, and our soldiers were on the upper floors, or in the corridors of the school, where there were fierce battles. Sometimes the enemy was in the next classroom, it was possible to knock him out of there only after blowing up the adjacent wall. But the battalion continued to hold this building. The enemy even tried to use flamethrowers during the storming of the school. Here, the so-called "puphen" ("chrysalis") faustpatrons mounted on a gun carriage turned out to be very out of place. It was a very effective infantry weapon that allowed firing from any room. But for this, first it was necessary to tackle the partition. The undoubted advantage of the "chrysalis" was that this weapon could fire from the upper floors, without the risk of being noticed by an enemy observer. The sound of the shot was drowned in the school rooms, and the flash was almost invisible from the street. In street battles, our snipers proved themselves excellently, who inflicted huge losses on the enemy, primarily to anti-tank gun crews. The defense of the cellars under the houses was a very difficult task for the commanders and their soldiers. The temperature in them heated up to 45 degrees. At the same time, they had to be vigilant both day and night in order to successfully repel the enemy's swift attack from houses on the opposite side of the street. This required the manifestation of simply superhuman qualities, for which they earned special thanks. I, Reinkober, spent several hours one night with these soldiers, who really were beyond praise. Withdrawal was not possible because we had no reserves. In such conditions, it was necessary to hold not just one block, but sometimes entire streets. We tried to help them by delivering seltzer water from the area next door to the abandoned factory on Hubenstrasse. In addition, each of the soldiers once an hour could briefly look out into the fresh air in order to rest for a minute and be ready for battle again. It should also be mentioned that at the command posts of companies and battalions, each of the soldiers could rest for a couple of hours every day to eat a cake (they were specially baked), drink coffee or beer (the latter was delivered from the brewery on Huben Strasse). In addition, they could smoke a cigar or cigarette. Each of the fighters was released from the front line for a week. This allowed them to relax. This practice has been highly commended in

parts."

Captain Rother spoke about the ingenuity characteristic of sappers. Basically he recalled a new type of mines:

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"The strengthening of our positions with wire and minefields was possible only in isolated cases, since the enemy detected even the slightest movement on the street. Besides,

traditional mining was ineffective due to the impossibility of disguising an ordinary mine in urban environments. But the streets of the city were simply littered with rubbish, broken bricks and fragments of tiles. This led us to the idea of the need to disguise mines as this rubbish. Wooden boxes of mines were smeared with glue and sprinkled with brick dust. As a result of these manipulations, they were very similar to bricks. After that, the edges of the wooden box were specially randomly broken off. Such mines, even from a distance of three meters, could hardly be distinguished from an ordinary brick. They were carried outside at night with the help of special rods. They were placed from windows, hatches and basements, in a word, so that the enemy would not notice our actions. In a few days, more than 5,000 infantry mines were placed in front of the positions of the 609th division in this way.

It is best to complete the topic of military "inventions" of that time with a story about the creation of the "Breslau heavy mortar." Even if not so many shots were fired from this type of weapons, which appeared already towards the end of the siege, this is not a reason to ignore this "know-how". The parents of this weapon were sapper officers: Captain Rother and Lieutenant Schultz, who was the commander of the 2nd company of the 6th technical battalion. Fierce street fighting and the lack of mortars among the Germans brought to life the need to create a special "projectile" that could use the most primitive ammunition. At the same time, he had to throw these charges in a steep arc from one side of the house to the other. After numerous unsuccessful experiments with offenders as a "projectile" and tin cans as a shell for the charge, the officers found forty pieces of 125-mm mortars in the arsenal warehouses (Frankfurt Strasse), for which there were no ammunition and goniometers. Breslau had a considerable number of cartridge cases for 88 mm anti-aircraft guns. From them, it was decided to make a shell for the charge, which was supposed to be filled with shrapnel and explosives extracted from unexploded Soviet shells and mines. Without going into details of the design and production process, it should be noted that the skilled workers of Breslau, risking their lives, released up to 300 such charges per day. Such a supply could be enough for about 10 days of fighting on the "southern" front. Later, these "shells" were used for defensive battles on the "Western" front. This improvised weapon received very favorable reviews from the crews of the "projectile launchers". The explosion from it gave a large number of fragments.

The story of the defense of Breslau would be incomplete without mentioning what happened in the artillery units. Colonel Urbatis, commander of the fortress artillery, who died in 1958, told General Niehof about the use of anti-aircraft guns and searchlights in the battles for the Gandau airfield:

"In early February, the enemy began to use a huge number of searchlights to interfere with aircraft that were supposed to land at the Gandau airfield. We counted about 50 of them. Our artillery-instrumental reconnaissance battalion (AIR), which arrived at my request in mid-March in Breslau, established the exact location of the searchlights. Now we could quite successfully fire at them from anti-aircraft artillery. After that, we began to observe interruptions in the work of searchlights. From the intercepted radiograms, we learned that many searchlights went out not without our help. Three days later, the Russians had taken all the searchlights to a distance of about six kilometers, and therefore nothing more interfered with the landing of our planes. One could talk about the success of anti-aircraft artillery and its real help in supplying Breslau by air. As of February 1, 1945, the entire ammunition in the fortress was approximately 130,000 shells. Systematic combing in search of ammunition gave amazing results. Approximately 100 thousand blanks of shells for light field howitzers were found, as well as powder for charging shells. These blanks were completed by specialists who installed fuses in them. The explosives that were used for the charges of the "Breslau mortar" were mined mainly from unexploded Russian bombs and shells. IN

some of them, instead of fuses, we found amazing leaflets in which it was written in German: "Friends, we cannot do anything more for you."

What difficulties the pilots had to face when they were supposed to land at the Gandau airfield, one of the radio operators recalled after the war:

"The Russian air defense was surprisingly powerful. Our reconnaissance aircraft counted about 90 medium and heavy batteries of anti-aircraft artillery and at least 100 searchlights, which were concentrated near Breslau. The number of Russian fighters operating at night is difficult to ascertain. At first, our losses were not great. But everything changed in mid-March. Our squadron, numbering ten crews and machines, only in the second half of March lost 4 crews and 5 machines. One crew managed to escape. Our comrades were able to jump out of the burning car, after which they landed by parachute on the territory near the Neisse, which was controlled by our troops. Colleagues who participated in the supply of Stalingrad by air stated that the Russian air defense near Breslau was much more powerful. Landing at the Gandau airfield was also hampered by the fact that the advanced Russian units were located literally half a kilometer from the runways. As soon as we approached, they began to blind us with searchlights and fire from machine guns. In addition, the Russians, as soon as they heard the noise of the engines, began to shell the territory of the airfield with mortars. Among the wounded whom we had to take back, there were often 14-year-old boys from the Volkssturm. All the crews were indignant at the fact that children were being driven into battle, and therefore they tried to take as many boys as possible. The take-off airfields from which Breslau was supplied were located in Klotsche (Dresden) and Utrebog (Berlin). In addition to several squadrons consisting of Junkers-52s, several more squadrons of Henkel-111s performed tasks. But from them, loads could only be dropped at high altitude, which led to the inaccuracy of their hit. When landing and taking off from Gandau, we saw the glow of fires raging in the city. On the way back we dropped leaflets written in Russian. Radio exchange between the "ground" and Breslau, which was necessary in the conditions of night flights, was significantly hampered by enemy radio stations. As a result, we often missed the city, immediately falling under enemy anti-aircraft fire.

The diary of the flight radio operator mentioned above tells about the drama and danger of flying to Breslau. Entry dated March 17, 1945:

"At around 4:30 in the morning, we turned towards the city. Strong cloud cover. Communication with Gandau is completely absent, so we turned to the Friesian Meadow. Despite the fact that we were flying at an altitude of 250-300 meters, it was impossible to make out anything. We headed to the place where the containers were supposed to be dropped. Suddenly we came under fire from two 37mm guns at once. Something cracked in the tail. We repeatedly found ourselves in the rays of enemy searchlights. Our pilot either tried to wag between them, or tried to gain altitude. At the same time, the bombs (with mail and provisions) were removed. You could no longer think about dropping them ... At one time everything went quite well. We tried to sneak north out of this witch's ring as unobtrusively as possible. Suddenly, a bluish gleam flickered on the propellers and the edges of the wings. Searchlights were looking for us, but they could not find us in dense clouds. At 6:10 a.m. we landed at Dresden-Klotzsche. We immediately noticed a huge hole in the left stabilizer and countless holes in the altitude corrector and fuselage. In addition, two cargo containers were pierced almost through. We announced our arrival. It was only after that that we learned that four cars were missing today."

The air supply crisis for Breslau is even reported in the war diary of the Wehrmacht High Command:

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March 24, 1945. Breslau's supply is hampered by enemy searchlights. To date, 65 Junkers have disappeared, which is an irreparable loss, since their

production stopped."

Despite all efforts, German planes could not always land on the airfield. So, for example, on March 15, out of 55 aircraft sent to Gandau, only half were able to land. The remaining 150 wounded had to be distributed to other flying machines. If we talk about mid-March, then for the period March 15-18, 156 aircraft took part in the supply of Breslau, most of which did not land at the airfield, but dropped cargo from the air. A significant part of these "supply bombs", containing medicines and ammunition, did not reach the Breslau defenders. Some of them fell on Soviet positions, some on swampy and flooded territories, from where it was impossible to extract them. In the last days of March, literally on the eve of the capture of the territory of the Gandau airfield by the Red Army, air communication with Breslau ceased altogether. Hugo Ertung recalled this episode:

"Mail is delivered to the city in the strangest way. Planes with ammunition can no longer land, as too many vehicles have been lost in the city. And the wounded themselves, whose removal was supposed to be by air, consider this possibility as a kind of execution. Now letters are delivered to the city in special bombs by parachutes."

But back to the gunners of Breslau. The abundance of blanks with explosives was also reported by graduate engineer Emil Koger, who in those days was a representative of the directorate of the FAMO company:

"A Swiss engineer allegedly tried unsuccessfully to cope with this task for a whole month. The problem was that the explosives had to be smelted. This was possible at 90°, but at 102° it exploded. I had no problem coping with these conditions. I got a special caramel kettle from the confectionery factory. After that, I created from it and a steam boiler a special installation in which the temperature was regulated by means of a valve. We quickly learned to regulate the temperature very precisely, after which we began to cook explosives. Unfortunately, the chief pyrotechnician of this enterprise ignored my insistent advice that it was better to take part of the production outside. As a result, one day there was an explosion of vapors, which claimed the lives of many people.

If we talk about the medical service in the besieged Breslau, then we must first list all the hospitals that were in the fortress. Three of them were located in aboveground bunkers: in the Scheitniger Star, at the Odertor station (Oder Gate) and on Strigauer Platz. Four hospitals were located in underground bunkers: at the New Market, on Blucher Square, on Vahtennaya Square and at the main city station. In addition, ten hospitals were reclassified as military hospitals, including the Wenzel-Hanke Hospital, the Israelite Hospital, the Boarding School for the Blind at the Monastery of the Merciful Brothers, Batanin, the reserve military hospital XSh on Lessinga Street, the seminary in Karlovice, the St. Joseph, a former hospice (an institution for the terminally ill) and Hedwigstift. Sixteen more hospitals were opened in the basements of various institutions: land insurance offices, the university, wine cellars, the "white house" in the New Market, the "At the Crow" hotel, the Brenninkmayer office, the Knitell trading house, the Bosch representative office, the building of the Dortmund Union, "Hanse cellars", the Supreme Land Court, the New Labor Exchange, etc. d.

As Breslau's situation worsened, some of the hospitals had to be urgently evacuated. In February 1945, the wounded were taken out of the Wenzel-Hanke Hospital, the Israeli Hospital and the hospital located in the basement of the land insurance office. With the beginning of the "Easter battle", the Germans urgently curtailed the work of the hospital in

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boarding school for the blind. At the end of April, the hospital on Strigauer Platz ceased its activities. At the same time, several hospitals in the city, such as the All Saints Hospital, served only the civilian population. Sometimes the command of individual units took the initiative and created their own hospitals. So, for example, there was a hospital at Mora's regiment. At first it was located on Matthias Platz. It was supplied with 60 beds for wounded soldiers and 20 beds for civilians. However, the hospital itself, which was led by the junior field doctor Dr. Busse, was intended for the treatment of minor injuries.

After Breslau was surrounded by Soviet troops, and in mid-February 1945, railway communication with the rest of Germany ceased, preparations began for the removal of wounded German soldiers by air. Regarding the principle of selecting wounded soldiers to be evacuated, several orders were issued. If until the beginning of March those soldiers who could not quickly recover were to remain in Breslau, then the new commandant of the fortress, General Niehof, found this state of affairs extremely strange. As a result, precisely those soldiers and patients, whose recovery was not expected within the next two months, began to be sent to the "mainland" via the "air bridge". According to Dr. Graefe, about 6,600 wounded German soldiers were airlifted out of Breslau. Oberfeldwebel of the Medical Service Wahl was actually responsible for the removal of the wounded from Breslau. He recalled:

"For the night transportation of the wounded from the Gandau airfield, their maximum number was placed in adjacent buildings and barracks. In conditions of excellent cooperation with the signalmen, who maintained constant contact with all the ambulance bases and ambulance stations, we delivered the wounded to the airfield in the shortest possible time. The number of "sitting" and "lying" wounded in

overcrowded hospitals. After that, Sanka²⁴ units sent their vehicles to specially designated hospitals. Transportation of the wounded was carried out not only on ambulances, but also on buses. Everything was done to get them back on the road as soon as possible. Those who did not fit on the plane were accommodated in the surrounding barracks, and therefore there was no need to wait for an ambulance to bring them back to the hospital. But after the hut was destroyed by a Soviet bomb (fortunately, at that time there were no people in it), the wounded began to be accommodated in the building of a boarding school for the blind. How many wounded were taken out depended largely on the pilot. Usually no more than 28 people were placed on the plane, although one of the pilots somehow managed to take out 32 wounded from Breslau. Despite the night artillery and mortar attacks, Sanka acted flawlessly. None of the Junkers returned empty." If we talk about air transport, then the same Oberfeldwebel Wahl recalled: "One night a courier plane landed in Breslau. Several times the Russians tried to hit him with anti-aircraft guns. In Gandau, he did not find anyone who could be taken out. He immediately inquired about this from the commandant of the fortress. He was worried about the fact that he had to fly back empty, without taking on board any wounded. As a result, the chief physician of the fortress was raised on alarm. He, in turn, found me. I had to explain that Junkers was already full of wounded. The fact is that the nervous pilot did not notice the barracks located next to the airfield. The following memories have been preserved of measures for the urgent evacuation of the wounded from military hospitals: "One night, after several bombs hit the ground bunker building and artillery fire began to intensify, an order was received to vacate the building in a few hours. Civilians, officers, nurses and slightly wounded soldiers began to leave the building on their own. The commandant of the fortress provided us with all the transport at his disposal. Former omnibuses and other vehicles stretched out in a long column. On these vehicles that night we were able to transport about 1,200 wounded, including those who were lying down. It was an amazing result!"

²⁴ Sanka is an abbreviation of Sapyydyk gayyyyyheyo. Designation of the structure involved in sanitary transportation.

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After the Germans lost the Gandau airfield, the transport of the wounded by air also ended. Sanitary bases and hospitals were overcrowded, and every day the number of wounded grew steadily. Doctors and nurses worked around the clock. For the wounded themselves, staying in bunkers, where there was clearly not enough fresh air, was a form of torture. Due to the lack of fuel, ventilation did not actually work in them. The ventilation equipment started up less and less. The only joy for hospitals in those conditions was a significant stock of food. Despite the closeness, the doctors and the wounded still did not suffer from hunger.

As mentioned above, on February 28, the creation of the "Perzel armored train" began at the FAMO enterprises. It was ready by March 20, 1945. This combat vehicle immediately began to take part in the battles in the Mohburn area. The armored train was armed with four 88 mm anti-aircraft guns, one 37 mm and four 20 mm anti-aircraft guns, as well as two machine guns of the MG 42 type. In addition, a radio station was installed on the armored train. The crew of the armored train was 108 people, including 6 drivers who were also firemen, 18 people serving the locomotive, 32 railway workers and tower repair specialists. The train itself reported directly to the commandant of the fortress. Due to its technical attachment to the rails, the armored train was ill-suited for protracted battles. General Niehoff was well aware of this. But, on the other hand, this combat vehicle was indispensable where a swift blow was required, which should have been accompanied by fire from all available guns. In the context of the use of such tactics, the train proved to be indispensable during the fighting in the southwestern theater of operations, primarily during the defense of the Gandau airfield. By the way, even before the onset of April, the crew of a German armored train destroyed seven Soviet tanks and three aircraft. Among other things, the appearance of the armored train had a positive psychological effect on the German soldiers. On the first Easter day, when a shower of Soviet bombs and shells fell on Breslau, the armored train received a hole. A hit by a Soviet shell damaged the pumping unit, which was responsible for supplying water. However, the crew of the armored train was able to bring the car to the depot, where it immediately began to be repaired. The situation on the "Western" front that had developed after Easter 1945 did not allow the use of a German armored train there. As a result, he was sent to the "northern" front. On this sector of the front, the armored train supported Vel's regiment with its fire. Cruising along the northern sector of the front, the armored train also provided fire support to the Sauer regiment north of Karlovitz and on the northern outskirts of Rosenthal. If we talk about its effectiveness, then one figure can be given - 30% of the losses in those days on this sector of the front were caused precisely by the crew of the German armored train.

How did the civilian population feel at that time? On March 7, 1945, Gauleiter Hanke issued an order called "Labor service for every citizen." Its first lines stated:

"Just as a soldier who leaves his post is punished by death as a deserter, the same punishment awaits all those who will deliberately evade labor service in a fortress." A number of points followed, including:

"2. All male and female population of the fortress (including 10-year-old boys and 12-year-old girls) are required to serve labor service....

6. Participation in the work is daily confirmed by a special stamp, which is affixed either by the head of the local party group or by the head of the work site.

7. The application of punishment is considered valid in respect of non-observant young people under the age of 16 who are caring for parents or children.

8. Anyone who, starting March 11, 1945, does not have a work card with a daily stamp in his hands, is brought before the court for trial.

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9. Anyone who deliberately fails to comply with this order is punishable by death."

In this document, not a word was said about the construction of the runway, but it was understood that new workers were required at this particular facility. Every day the construction of the strip cost the city a lot of sacrifices. It was possible to complete this enterprise only if total labor mobilization was carried out in the city, when even weak children were to be sent to the construction site.

The territory of the Frisian Meadow and the adjacent stadium as an option for the construction of an alternate urban airfield were rejected due to the fact that in the spring this area was usually marshy. The studies undertaken have shown that the planes could hardly eat up and take off in the given area. As a result, it was decided to speed up the construction of runways in the area of the Scheitniger Star. Needless to say, the Soviet units could not fail to notice the accumulation of a large number of people between the Knyazhesky and Kaiser bridges. As a result, this area was subjected to heavy artillery fire almost daily. Trummerplatz was the hardest hit in the area. In general, all these neighborhoods were considered the inner "science city" of Breslau. Here, on the Tiergarten Strasse, the state archives and university hospitals were located, on the embankment there was the Technical University, which consisted of many buildings. As a result, there is nothing surprising in the fact that most of the documents on the history of Breslau and Silesia were destroyed during the fires in the archive. But besides this, the construction of the airfield required countless casualties every day - the number of dead and wounded was not even counted.

The introduction of de facto universal labor conscription required local party organs to draw up lists of refugees who were in a particular quarter. But the migration of the population within the city was huge, so it was almost impossible to find a specific person according to these lists. In this situation, the following fact is striking. Even in March 1945, Gestapo agents continued to search houses and basements for "non-Aryan elements." They also compiled lists of people who "lived" in certain buildings. Even in the conditions of the complete encirclement of the city, on the eve of the collapse of the Nazi regime, the Nazi bureaucracy did not want to get rid of its methods. However, many people managed to avoid getting into forced labor. Even some Wehrmacht soldiers managed to get lost in the crowd of civilians. An example of this is a certain Dr. Conradi. Cecile Babisch recalled after the war:

"He was" escaped "with the advanced cavalier of the Knight's Cross. I saw him dressed in a gray civilian suit with a doctor's bag and a stethoscope. He collected elderly people for examination in a house located near the sickness funds. After the end of the siege, he headed west with one of the first trains of the Red Cross.

The time of the assault on Breslau was rich in all kinds of adventurers. Surprisingly, but a fact - even in these difficult conditions, several groups of anti-fascist Resistance operated in the fortress. They were well-hidden and undertook their sorties very carefully and prudently. As a result, most anti-fascists managed to survive until May 1945. On the other hand, the city prisons were filled with so-called "defeatists". At the end of the war, "spreading defeatist sentiments" was considered a state crime, and therefore executions took place daily in Breslau prisons. Maria Langner, in her book *The Last Bastion*, cited information that in the prison on Klechkau Strasse, which ran north of the Odertor station, the executions of townspeople who were careless in their statements continued even in the first days of May 1945. Cecile Babish, already mentioned by us, recalled how easy it was to get into prison for "defeatism". Almost in the style of a diary entry, she narrated:

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"Dad was taken away by the Gestapo. Mrs. Hirschman denounced him." Further it was reported:

"All his fault was that he gave my uncle a dirty shirt that one of the former residents of the house left during the evacuation. He was sent to the Klechkau Strasse prison. The cell with ten beds was filled with 36 people. After 10 days, he was released without any explanation or proceedings."

On March 11 (it was the third Sunday before Easter), Breslau was bombarded and bombarded with such force as he had not known since the beginning of the siege. On this day, the commandant of the fortress appointed a day of commemoration of "heroes of all military units." Commemoration took place directly in military units. At this event, in one of the battalions, the consistory councilor Buchsel, the only civilian, was present. Advisor

recalled:

"Major Count Seydlitz gave a speech in front of 80 employees of the training battalion in the gymnasium of the monastery of St. Ursuline. His speech was sometimes drowned in the roar of breaks. Count Seidlitz was a committed evangelist. During the struggle of the state against the church, he remained for many years a member of the provincial council of the Confessing Church. Later, shortly before the surrender of the city, he would die at his command post from a direct hit by a shell. He commanded a reserve training battalion from 1939. After the outbreak of the war, he visited me more than once to inquire about affairs in the church, and we had heartfelt conversations. On the evening of the same Sunday, in the basement of the Batanin, a concert was held for the soldiers of the Volkssturm, in which the staff doctor Haak and Oberleutnant Heimbyn took part. In addition, the violinist Maximilian Hennig, who ended up in the militia, performed. The choir of sisters of mercy alternately with Hennig performed Bach and Paganini.

Ernst Hornig recalled the bombings that Breslau was subjected to in March 1945:

"Most of the time we moved through narrow streets so that low-flying planes could not see us. Once, a bomb fell 5 meters behind us. But she didn't break! On another occasion, when we were already turning onto Feldstrasse, a large building that housed one of the branches of the savings bank collapsed from bomb explosions. If they had been there at least half a minute earlier, they would have been immediately buried under the rubble of the house.

By mid-March, there were not enough cemeteries in the city to bury the dead. In the Igoga, burials began to be made right on Bondarnaya Square. An eyewitness recalled:

"The huge common graves that stretched along the entire square were reburied much later. The dead and the dead from all parts of the city were brought here. Usually buried without a funeral. The priest arrived only if 30-50 bodies were delivered at a time... The so-called cemetery on Bondarnaya Square was an eerie place. But it was a forced measure. In those days, it was important that every buried person be listed. If the relatives of the deceased ever returned to Breslau, they would at least know where the grave was."

The shelling and bombardment of Breslau intensified every day. March 20 Herman Novak wrote in his diary:

"After each bomb explosion, several people die. Women scream terribly ... We sleep like hares - with open eyes. We sleep and wait for death. Pilots constantly bombard the runway. And again heaps of the dead. But action is still being taken. Road services take out the garbage. The poles are assembled

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tires, lights. Barricades are erected from them. A week later, the same Novak writes: "Residents are fleeing the western regions. Many pass by us. And day and night, around the clock - a stream of suffering and grief. No one knows where they can be safe, where they can survive. If a friend passes by, then no one stops to say hello. If we estimate the total losses among the civilian population during the construction of the runways of the "inner airfield", then, according to various estimates, by the end of the siege of Breslau they amounted to at least 10 thousand people! One priest recalled this cursed place: "Hundreds of girls and women who, like slaves, are driven to work by party functionaries. They die or become crippled under fire from low-flying Russian planes. But Hanke orders to build further. He intends to follow the Führer's order."

The people of Breslau should have understood that they owed their position to Hitler. As a result, neither the Führer nor the Gauleiter had any confidence. These sentiments were fueled by Soviet propagandists who, through loudspeakers and in leaflets, used a slogan that in many ways resembled a rhyme or proverb:

"Don't rely on Niehoff until Hanke is hanged."

Every day the inhabitants stopped believing in the promised release of the city. Panic grew in the city. As an eyewitness recalled, in the tram one elderly woman lamented:

"If we have no way out, the Führer will poison us all with gas."

Hugo Ertung, who was in the hospital at the Monastery of the Merciful Brothers on March 23, recalled:

"In the afternoon I found myself in a strange company: among several Russian prisoners and a downed officer of the British Air Force. They don't see each other as allies... We live in a strange world. Probably in a few days we will become the captives of our captives."

At the end of World War II, Hitler decided to personally plan all military operations and control their progress. So what did the battle for Breslau and the Führer's headquarters look like? We must immediately make a reservation that at some point Gauleiter Hanke asked Hitler for heavy infantry guns. This was done by radiogram. At one of the evening operational meetings, Hitler stated:

"A radiogram has just arrived, where he (Gauleiter Hanke. - A.V.) reports that the enemy is using heavy weapons, for which there are no means to fight. Therefore, he requests heavy infantry weapons. As often happens in such cases, the heavy guns are now being repaired. However, I ordered that they be delivered from the central ... The army group itself does not have any heavy guns ... after that it was reported that this type of gun could not fit in an aircraft, and therefore it was not possible to deliver them by air. In fact, this is only an unwillingness to maintain an air bridge ... In reality, the guns can be delivered on six cargo gliders.

The very idea of bringing heavy guns to Breslau in gliders was quite risky. But Hitler used this occasion to criticize all the authorities (not excluding Hanke himself) who were engaged in the defense and supply of the fortress.

At Hitler's headquarters, they completely ignored the message about General Niehoff, who strongly recommended abandoning this venture because of its complete senselessness. Cargo gliders could hardly land both in Gandau and on a half-finished

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airstrip in the city itself. But, nevertheless, no one dared to cancel the Führer's order. Cargo gliders with eight heavy infantry guns, ammunition and a company

gunners were lifted into the air. Only one glider reached the target. Accordingly, only one gun and a few artillerymen were delivered to the city. All other gliders were shot down on approach to the city. Such a scam finally undermined the credibility of Hitler, or rather, his style of command. The possibility of saving Breslau with just eight guns was not just a military adventure, it was one of the illusions that Hitler was in captivity. Let us emphasize once again that although in his telephone conversation General Niehoff mentioned more than once that he did not need guns, but ammunition, in Berlin they preferred to listen to Hanke's opinion. This once again demonstrated the distrust of the generals, which Hitler demonstrated almost daily at the end of the war. The scam with gliders and heavy guns ended in complete failure.

By the end of March, differences in the situation of people became apparent. While some were dying of their wounds in overcrowded infirmaries, others were getting drunk every weekend. While some fought fierce street battles day after day, others did not intend to deny themselves the joys of life. Officially, the presence of women in the location of the units was prohibited, but this did not prevent some officers from visiting neighboring houses. The more hopeless Breslau's position became, the more clearly the signs of decay appeared in the army environment. Erich Schoenfelder, an officer who was constantly on the front line among the soldiers, described the situation in those days as follows:

"The feeling that life was ending made many try to take everything from it in the last days or weeks. As a rule, consolation was found in women and in wine. Uniform orgies have become a ubiquitous phenomenon. The number of robberies of abandoned apartments grew day by day. Robbers were not only deserters, but also civilians. The next morning, many were dragged out of the stinking cellars for divorce with very young girls. It was the lost youth. But who could condemn them?

There were many examples of the fact that in the headquarters the officers almost every night had a sexual relationship with the "assistants of the Wehrmacht." One of the officers recalled after the war that "serf girlfriends" were the most common thing.

Executions of deserters and robbers could not restore order in the city. These tough measures no longer frightened anyone. Anyone could die in Breslau at any moment. Human life has been completely devalued. Give in to temptation rather than die; profit rather than need. The city seemed to be completely demoralized. There were many tragic events. In the diary of one of the eyewitnesses, an entry was preserved:

"Today, by the verdict of a military tribunal, a young soldier was shot, accused of robberies ... As it turned out, he and his father stole two mattresses from an abandoned house in the southern quarters, which he intended to use for his shelter. And shortly before that, he was awarded the Iron Cross for his courage on the battlefield."

There were other, no less significant cases. In March 1945, two Volkssturmists were shot. Gauleiter refused to pardon them, as, in his opinion, they were "deserters". They were already middle-aged tailor and sales agent. They left their positions in Lessing Square only after their company was completely destroyed. As a result, they had to end up in the same grave with their colleagues who died in battle.

Hitler's insane orders and the cruelty of Field Marshal Schörner, who demanded tougher discipline in units with the help of executions, had a very strong effect on German officers. The decomposition of army units became almost universal. Some officers almost openly participated in the looting of empty apartments. However, unlike civilians and Volkssturmists, no one intended to shoot them. Almost everything was taken: furniture, utensils, carpets. Over time, they even began to look through their fingers

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for the stay of women in the location of military units. The population began to grumble, dissatisfied with the fact that the military units drove out their basements, forcing them to take refuge either on the upper floors of the houses, which was very unsafe, or to look for new basements. Rumors spread among the residents about night orgies organized by some officers. However, the official serf newspaper preferred to remain silent about these shameful phenomena. On its pages, as before, peppy propaganda appeals appeared, which were interspersed with orders to execute marauders and deserters. She urged "to take courage and strengthen the defense", while ordinary people were more interested in pressing problems: the search for missing relatives, attempts to provide themselves with food, the desire to hide from shelling and bombing. As a result, all official appeals have already ceased to have any effect on the civilian population, which preferred to focus on information transmitted by foreign radio stations. The news was passed from mouth to mouth in whispers, as many were afraid of being shot on charges of "spreading defeatist sentiments." The military reports of the High Command of the German Land Forces could no longer mislead anyone. At the end of March 1945, Paul Peikert wrote in his diary:

"Decisive events are taking place on all fronts. Pal Koenigsberg. Danzig taken by the Russians. From the territory of Hungary they are approaching Vienna... Styria is in a critical situation. All territories west of the Rhine, from Emmerich to Mannheim, are controlled by the Americans and the British. At a rapid pace, their tanks are approaching Würzburg and Nuremberg ... Most of the territory of the Ruhr is also in their hands.

Such information reinforced Breslau's sense of hopelessness. The hopes that were still glimmering in early March that the city would still be deblocked completely disappeared by the end of the month. It was difficult to hide the obvious lack of ammunition. Hugo Ertung wrote in those days:

"Soldiers from spare parts often do not even have a pistol in service. Rifles are out of the question."

Around the same time, Ertung wrote:

"In reports from the front, the wounded, apparently for some stupid conspiracy, are called "mulattos", and the dead are called "Indians". Their number is steadily growing every day, and therefore it is difficult to establish what forces really hold the city.

The discontent of the population reached such a high level that on March 26, unknown persons set fire to the Haase brewery, which was supplying soldiers and officers. This was followed by several actions that somewhat resembled the assassination attempt on Hitler, which was undertaken on July 20, 1944. Two headquarters of the local bodies of the NSDAP were blown up. Friedrich Giriger recalled these events:

"The spirit of the population was finally undermined by two explosions. On March 30, the premises of the party cells in Gneisenau and in Elbing flew into the air. Everything was done according to the model on July 20. Briefcases stuffed with explosives were thrown into them. The attackers themselves were able to sneak out of these buildings unnoticed. One can only speculate what was the reason for these actions. Maybe it was revenge for the unceremonious treatment of women and children who were building the runway at constant risk to their lives ... Judging by the identity of the explosions, the attackers were in touch with each other. All those who worked in the party headquarters perished... The serf newspaper and the radio kept silent about these events, although rumors about them began to spread at the speed of light. So we learned that, despite all the vigilance of the Gestapo, in the encircled city, not only were there, but resistance groups were actively operating. In addition, some internal resistance was felt among the desperate population. People were dissatisfied with the dictates of the party

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officials, and therefore these sorties did not have to be the actions of the communists. In the prison on Klechkau Strasse, the number of those executed "for defeatism" is increasing every day. Death has reaped a good harvest."

Summing up the results of March 1945 in Breslau, it can be noted that strategic planning came to the fore for the headquarters of the fortress. On the "southern" front, the Soviet onslaught gradually weakened, until the attacks of the Red Army units stopped altogether. The German defense, becoming more skillful and fierce every day, demanded new victims from the Soviet command. The continuation of the Soviet offensive in this particular direction was perceived as illogical and inappropriate. In addition, the possible penetration of the Red Army into the southern part of Breslau was a very dubious success. From a tactical point of view, he gave almost nothing, and the price could be prohibitive.

The fighting began to subside even on the "Western" front. It was important for the fortress headquarters to guess what the Soviet command was planning. It makes sense to look back here. The Soviet command, which failed at the end of January 1945 to take Breslau "from a sloop", that is, during a general offensive, decided to abandon the idea of storming from the east side. In February, the main attacks on the besieged fortress were delivered from the south and southwest (opposite the Gandau airfield). In the remaining sectors of the front, units of the Red Army were limited to small reconnaissance operations. In late February - early March, several attempts were made to penetrate the city from the north by Soviet troops, but they never developed into a powerful offensive. For the Germans, the situation was undoubtedly beneficial. All the offensives undertaken by the Soviet troops were not simultaneous. Moreover, all operations were not coordinated among themselves, which allowed the Germans to skillfully use their limited reserves and not completely exhaust their meager stocks of artillery shells. Did the Soviet command draw the right conclusions by the beginning of April?

According to General Niehof:

"The Soviet troops almost broke their neck in the south, they were not able to advance from the southeast, since the Ole lowlands were flooded, and besides this, Breslau himself was supplied by air."

In this situation, the commandant of the fortress draws the right conclusion - the Red Army units will storm Breslau from the west. Mora's regiment, weary of battles, was on this sector of the front. In the southern theater of operations, from 5 to 15 March, he was relieved by Besslein's regiment. Mora's own regiment was sent west to rest from the fighting!

General Niehof fully assumed that the Soviet troops would try to cross the Oder. In the Schmiedefeld region, the river had the smallest width in those parts. In addition, from this area it was very convenient to storm the Gandau airfield, which had long been the cherished goal of the Red Army units. To protect this sector of the front, the commandant of the fortress sent his "gold reserve", two airborne parachute battalions. The main forces of Mora's regiment were located north of the airfield between the Oder and Pilsint. The defense was supposed to be held by the forces of three battalions and the 21st Volkssturm battalion, commanded by the old guards huntsman Pflanz. In his actions, he was subordinate to the commander of the battle group, Major Tilgner. The headquarters of the fortress, considering the possibility of blocking the "Tilgner group" by the Soviet troops or pushing it back, developed a plan to transfer it across the Oder in the area of the Ranzener locks.

In order to reinforce the positions of Mohr's regiment, General Niehof ordered the German artillery to be sent to the west, where he thought of the bloodiest battles in the future. At the disposal of Lieutenant Colonel More were not only heavy anti-aircraft guns, which were supposed to hit the Soviet units with almost direct fire, but also about twenty twin 20-mm automatic guns, which were supposed to support German paratroopers with their fire. And, finally, on the "western" front it was supposed to use

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tanks and assault guns from the tank destroyer unit. For the Germans, everything was not so hopeless at first glance. General Niehoff wrote about this:

"We should have been grateful to the circumstances for being able to prepare for the attack planned by the enemy. And also for the fact that the enemy command made mistake after mistake during the offensive, without preparing a powerful assault on Breslau, in which all its forces would take part.

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Chapter 6

It is well known that communication between the command and units, including those fighting on the front line, has been and is the most important condition for the successful implementation of combat operations. The battles for Breslau were no exception. The fact that the Soviet troops managed to penetrate the fortress from the south, and then the west, oddly enough, made life much easier for the German signalmen. The fact is that in the conditions of urban battles it was possible to use a cable network protected from shelling, laid underground. If the fighting had been going on outside Breslau, then the Germans would have had to stretch wires for field telephones right on the ground. But for this they might not have had enough forces at their disposal, not to mention the fact that during the battles it would be very difficult to maintain such telephone lines in order. General von Alphen noted with satisfaction:

"Luckily for me, the signal commander was transferred to Breslau back in January 1945. Thus, ahead of time it was possible to lay the necessary lines and complete the formation of the regiment on time. connections".

Lieutenant Colonel Wittenberg was appointed commander of the signalers. He himself recalled:

"My first duty was the formation of a communications unit. I was lucky that there were a sufficient number of non-commissioned officers and soldiers who served in signal units at the assembly and recruiting stations. But there were clearly not enough officers."

The formation of separate communications platoons, which were to operate under independent infantry units, was completed very quickly. It turned out to be a more difficult task to supply them with the necessary tools and materials, since most of the equipment was removed from their cities in a timely manner. Combining warehouses and stations did not give the required number of devices. In the end, it was decided to resort to some kind of improvisation. It was not necessary to count on deliveries from the "mainland", since ammunition was brought in first by air. In order to eliminate the lack of equipment, the specialists of the Telefunken enterprise converted old, decommissioned postal telephones into field communication devices. Radio stations were assembled from old radios. If we talk about the vehicles of signalmen, then in this matter things were by no means rosy. They mainly consisted of abandoned cars and several horse-drawn carts found in Breslau. The connection teams and the anti-jamming teams mostly traveled by bicycle. As mentioned above, the original location of the headquarters of the fortress in the building on Gabitz-Strasse was very unfortunate from a military point of view. The move of the headquarters in mid-February to the Liebig hills was more favorable not only from a tactical point of view, but also for laying COMMUNICATION LINES.

Since the headquarters of the fortress did not always have at its disposal the necessary maps, on which telephone cables lying underground were marked, the connection group of the 3rd division of the communications regiment turned out to be in fact indispensable. The fact is that this group was staffed by employees of the Telegraph Communications Department, who knew almost by heart

where this or that cable was stretched. In addition, on the city island of Burgerwerder, communication was maintained with the help of telephone operators, who, according to the commandant of the fortress, did not leave their jobs at the telephone cabinets even under bombing. When the ring of Soviet encirclement closed around Breslau on February 15, the signalmen were ready to begin their duties. Before them were not the easiest tasks. Street fighting often led to the fact that the slowly retreating German units often changed the location of their command posts. Under these conditions, signalers had to quickly switch cable communication channels. If there was no underground cable network in the battle area, then they had to pull telephone wires through the destroyed streets under fire. If you ask yourself what kind of connection was

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it is preferable to use old cable networks or pull new overhead wires, then underground cables, although sometimes they strayed around the city, and access to them was very difficult, still remained the preferred type of communication. The fact that they were protected from shelling had an effect. Since March, when the city began to be subjected to heavy bombardments, this was a very important circumstance.

The placement of connection groups (and in the course of battles - already switching) and groups that extinguish radio interference in basements at communication hubs ensured that they could be raised at the first signal and complete the task assigned to them in the shortest possible time. Two telephone lines independent of each other, which in various ways connected the headquarters of the fortress with the front line, ensured uninterrupted communication with the commandant even in the conditions of the most powerful bombardments and artillery shelling.

Since the telephone cable, which provided communication with the command of the 17th Army in Waldenburg, was interrupted, the exchange of information had to be carried out by radio. The Germans had to create a special "decimeter communication" system, which consisted of two transmitting installations. One of them was identified in a high-rise building of the savings bank near the city Ring (corresponding station - just east of Waldenburg in the "High Owl"), and the second - on the building of a construction college (corresponding station - on the Giant Mountains). This communication system worked flawlessly until Breslau's surrender.

Three direction-finding radio stations were intended to intercept Soviet radio messages. Signalers who were fluent in Russian worked for them. Unencrypted information about the tactical intentions of the Red Army units was immediately sent to the headquarters of the fortress. However, the results of such interceptions became most revealing when a special secret coordinate grid was found on one of the killed (according to other sources, captured) Soviet officers. Now the Germans knew virtually everything about the intentions of the Soviet troops.

To make it difficult for the Soviet signalmen to intercept information in return, all code designations were changed twice a week in the Breslau garrison. In addition, during the retreat of German units, special groups of signalmen destroyed the cable system so that it could no longer be connected to it. It is worth noting that even in the chaos of the "Easter battle", when communication was constantly interrupted, the German signalmen restored it very quickly. As a result, the headquarters of the fortress did not lose contact with any of the fighting units. Often, Volkssturmists had to be involved to complete tasks.

The German signalmen had to work hard when the headquarters of the fortress was moved to the library cellars at the beginning of April 1945 on Sandy Island. The task was made easier by the fact that technical preparations for such a development of events began as early as February 1945. But by April, most of the cables laid almost two months ago were broken. Their repair was not possible, as most of the streets were littered with mountains of rubble. As a result, it was decided to use sewer networks for laying telephone cables. Laid at a depth of four meters underground, they reliably protected communications from shelling and bombing.

General Niehof recalled in his memoirs about Breslau signalers:

"A few days after the surrender, Soviet officers and political officers repeatedly asked me the question: how was it possible for the fortress to maintain contact with German authorities located outside Breslau until the last day of fighting? After all, they cut all the cables coming out of the city. I replied: "You could not waste time, since we ourselves cut all the wires." My answer surprised them greatly. During further interrogations, I realized that in the Red Army at that time they did not yet know about the decimeter connection.

Speaking of auxiliary divisions, one cannot fail to mention the FAMO enterprise. The FAMO Automobile and Motor Plant was the heir to the Linke Hofmann enterprise. This plant was not only the largest machine-building enterprise in Breslau, but because of the high quality of its products was known throughout the world. Since the beginning

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World War II, of course, "FAMO" was reoriented to the production of defense products. As of December 31, 1944, the FAMO workforce was about 8,000 people. After the evacuation of the factory in Schönebeck in Breslau, about 680 workers continued to work in the buildings of the enterprise. In mid-January 1945, the dismantling of the remaining equipment began, which was never completed, since the encirclement around the city turned out to be closed. As a result, 150 wagons with machine tools remained at the Freiburg railway station.

Despite the fact that almost all the workshops of the FAMO enterprise were evacuated, the commercial director Werner Shpott, as well as the director of the enterprise Georg Rubin (later he died in Soviet captivity), continued to deal with the affairs of the plant in Breslau. The main purpose of their stay was all possible assistance to the command of the fortress in the performance of important military tasks. As General von Alphen noted, they coped with this quite successfully. Almost immediately, the FAMO leadership established close ties with the fortress headquarters. At first, contact was maintained with General von Alphen, and later with General Niehof. It was the commandants of the fortress who determined the tasks that the FAMO employees had to perform. The secretary of the factory director, Konrad Kraft, recalled that "they had almost friendly relations with the generals and all the staff officers, which had a beneficial effect on the work itself."

After the Soviet troops bypassed Breslau from the west, on February 17, most of the workers were forced to leave the production facilities, which were located on Grund Strasse. In any case, FAMO's work continued until March, that is, until the workers had materials, spare parts and usable equipment at their disposal. At the same time, the work itself at FAMO was fraught with no less dangers than being on the front line. Soviet intelligence quickly revealed the new location of the enterprise (more precisely, its individual "workshops"), after which it was subjected to constant artillery fire. Most of the work was carried out in the building of the former Aviatik tobacco factory, which was located on Nikolaevskaya Street. Actually, the production of cigarettes was not stopped. The special machines available in the workshops allowed the FAMO workers, among other things, to produce up to 600 thousand cigarettes and cigarettes daily, which for the most part went to combat units. On the ground floor and in the spacious basement, there were plant administrations, a medical center, a factory kitchen and rest rooms for workers. Some of the machines turned out to be located in the basements of the supply department on Posener Strasse, and some in the cellars of the Museum of Ancient History on Graupen Strasse. In the basement under the Cathedral of Christ the Savior on Bondarnaya Square, an electrical substation was supposed to be located, supplying individual "workshops" of FAMO with energy. This choice was predetermined by the proximity of the city power plant. In addition, the workshops of the Imperial Railway on Matthias Strasse were actively used. It was there that an armored train was created, which took part in the defense of Breslau.

The "factory arrangement" department, which dealt with transportation and supply, was located in the basement of a corner building along Paul and Adabelrt Straße. During one of the bombings, the entire quarter was on fire. Employees of this department were hardly able to escape from the fires. Another part of the FAMO work team settled in the basement of a house at the intersection of Karl- and Schweidnitzer Strasse. Apart from the Germans, foreign workers worked there, who at one time were deported to Germany. By the way, there were quite a few of them in the besieged Breslau.

As mentioned above, FAMO workers had to constantly work under bombing and artillery fire. Konrad Kraft recalled one story:

"During an air raid, when 500-kilogram bombs were falling on the city, one of them flew through the window into our factory kitchen. She didn't break. The women who peeled the potatoes escaped with only a slight fright. The window had to be sealed with paper bales."

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Due to constant raids and shelling, the FAMO board changed its place of residence more than once. During the next move, it was located in the basement of a civil institution located on Friedrich Karl Street. On March 15, 1945, a new basement was selected. The irony of fate was that the next day there was nothing left of the former building. During the raid, not even the walls remained of it. After the line of battles began to pass along the line Frankfurt Street - the school park in Liegnitz by mid-March, the FAMO leadership was forced to leave Friedrich Karl Street. It moved to the basement on Klechkauer Strasse. By this time, the company was called nothing more than "the FAMO family." This was explained not only by concern for the team, but also by a whole program of measures that were supposed to brighten up its difficult existence. The relationship between ordinary workers and the "bosses", as follows from the memoirs, was indeed almost "family". So, sometimes, at the initiative of the board, artists from the Breslau Opera were invited to the "factory". One humorist was especially popular, whose reprises made it possible to brighten up an endless stay in the basements.

On one of the days of the siege, a large head of Parmesan cheese was delivered to the workers. In the absence of another opportunity to precisely divide it among all the workers, this hard cheese was grated, and then in the form of "shavings" it was given out in equal shares to all members of the labor collective. The "factory" even had its own "ambulance", which employed a paramedic and two nurses. Their tasks included first aid to the wounded workers. In addition, FAMO had its own fire brigade, which had two water pumps at its disposal. She helped put out fires not only in FAMO buildings, but also on neighboring streets.

It is impossible not to mention one side of the life of the besieged Breslau. Local residents usually expressed extreme dissatisfaction when one of the FAMO units ("workshops") appeared in their quarter. This reaction was largely understandable. People were afraid that after the appearance of the structure of a defense enterprise on their street, bombing and shelling of their districts would intensify. But soon the reaction changed to the completely opposite, since it was possible to die from a shell in any area of the block, and proximity to the FAMO enterprise had some undeniable advantages. If we do not take into account the mentioned "ambulance" and the fire brigade, then I would like to draw attention to the fact that special observers warned the leadership of "FAMO" ahead of time about the upcoming air raid, and therefore, the residents of all neighboring houses could find a suitable shelter in time. At the end of the siege of Breslau, FAMO earned the respect of not only civilians, but also German soldiers.

So what tasks that could be useful for the defense of the city did FAMO perform? Along with everyday production processes, I would like to pay attention to the most important points. The first task for "FAMO" was the formation of the so-called "paralytic teams" from among its workers. Their goal was to render machines unusable and

machine tools that could be captured by the Soviet troops (they were, as it were, "paralyzed"). First of all, this concerned 150 wagons with equipment and machine tools that remained at the Freiburg railway station. Some of them were to be destroyed, some were to be returned to improvised "workshops". In addition, FAMO was engaged in the repair of German tanks knocked out even before the encirclement of Breslau. At the initiative of the commandant of the fortress, they tried to install "non-tank" guns on some of them, which, as we remember, were in abundance in the fortress. The FAMO team also carried out routine repairs of tanks and assault guns from the tank destroyer unit. The task was really very important for the defense.

There were also some one-time promotions. So, for example, on the FAMO, a kind of armored domes were welded from armored disks, which were installed at the railway embankment near Pöpelwitz. Dug into the ground, such an armored dome became a small long-term firing point, in which a German machine-gun crew, inaccessible to Soviet bullets and fragments, could easily accommodate. In addition, there was a clear shortage of rocket launchers in Breslau. As a result, their handicraft production was established at FAMO. To make up for the lack of automatic weapons among the Breslau defenders, the

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Soviet repeating rifles captured in battle under German ammunition. Even experiments were carried out on the production of hand grenades. A noteworthy point was that in the warehouses of Breslau there were about a thousand machine guns of the latest model. But they could not be used by the Germans in battles, since a small part was missing in their shutter - one of the levers. No one knew what it should be in shape and what metal it should be made of. Using the available illustrated catalogs of spare parts for weapons, the workers tried to carve a suitable part, but all attempts were in vain.

Above, we have already cited the story that, at the initiative of General von Alphen, an armored train began to be produced at FAMO. The prerequisite for this was that the Hofmann Linke wagon factory had a sufficient number of bogies with axleboxes. On their basis, it was possible to create an armored train. It was built in an old Reichsbahn repair facility on Matthias Straße. This design participated in battles until March 20, 1945.

When street fighting intensified on the streets of Breslau, special armored boxes began to be produced at FAMO instead of armored caps. They were also cooked from sheet armor. The armored box was equipped with three wheels - two in front and one in the back. It was propelled by a long drawbar. The practice of using such an armored box was as follows. A machine gunner was placed in it, after which she was pushed out from around the corner. The German machine gunner, inaccessible to automatic and rifle bullets, made several bursts, after which the armored box was again dragged back around the corner. Such sorties went virtually unnoticed, since the Red Army was guided by the presence of a stationary machine-gun

nests.

When on the evening of February 1, 1945, the quartermaster of the 4th German Panzer Army sent the 2nd company of the 6th technical battalion to Breslau, he could hardly imagine how important this seemingly unremarkable at first would be for the defense of the fortress. look step. Actually, the commander of the 6th technical battalion himself, who entrusted the newly appointed company commander with a small task, did not know what a great service he rendered to the German garrison. The commander of the 2nd technical company was a graduate engineer Schulz, who already during the Second World War rose to the rank of lieutenant. Schultz himself was a native of Silesia. He knew Breslau very well, as he had previously studied here at the Technical University. In the future, not only the knowledge that he received during his studies was useful to him, but also close acquaintance (through his father) with many leading engineers and designers of the Silesian capital. This coincidence had great tactical consequences. It was thanks to Schultz that in Breslau, though intermittently, but still, until the very capitulation, the water supply worked, and electricity was supplied. However, when the lieutenant

Schultz reported to the commandant of the fortress that "in the event of a threat to encircle the city, his company had to leave Breslau", he did not receive permission for such a step. The company, staffed by technical specialists, consisted of 165 people. They even had at their disposal a special transport unit - 3 cars and 6 trucks. At first, the technical company reported directly to the headquarters of the fortress. Later, she was merged into the sapper regiment with the appropriate subordination. After that, the company was reinforced. It included:

- the remnants of the "Organization Todt" and Technical First Aid units;
- police demolition groups;
- Pyrotechnicians, explosion shielding specialists and soldiers of technical personnel who were left at the warehouses and supply structures in Breslau;
- workers and employees of the public utilities sector, as well as public utilities that were engaged in the maintenance of networks and pipelines (gas, water, electricity). Most of them were drafted into the Volkssturm and placed in barracks.

It was decided to use these valuable technical personnel, so to speak, for their intended purpose. After long discussions between representatives of various military units, it was decided to stop the recruitment of technical personnel into the ranks of the Volkssturm.

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In a very short period of time, the technical company expanded in size to the level of 2-3 battalions. She was given several specific tasks:

- ensuring the supply of water, gas and electricity inside Breslau;
- repair of runways at the Gandau airfield;
- undermining (if necessary) mined bridges, overpasses and important strategic facilities, including those intended for demolition for the construction of an airstrip;
- repair of bridges and overpasses;
- the use of vehicles as directed by the headquarters of the fortress;
- production of ammunition;
- overlapping of sewer networks;
- damming of the Ole River.

Let's talk about the most important tasks in order. Until February 21, the Dürrgay enterprise was used to supply the city with gas. In the next two weeks, the fortress received gas from the Breslau-Waldenburg main gas pipeline. Only by mid-March 1945 did the Soviet command come up with the idea to block this gas pipeline. Actually, this measure would not have been taken if a random fragment from a shell had not pierced the gas pipeline, and a fiery torch had not arisen. It was he who pointed out to the Red Army soldiers the fact of the presence of the main gas pipeline

Supplying the city with water and electricity was one of the most important strategic tasks. Dealing with them was no easy task. Numerous holes in the pipes, transformers destroyed during the shelling did not make it possible to immediately establish the cause of the "accidents". For the emergency option of supplying the city with water, several

additional tanks. They were located to the west in the brewery area, near the Watch Square and in the indoor pool on the Zwinger Strasse. These structures could maintain the supply of water to the water supply system even in the most critical situation. In addition, a special water supply line was created, through which water was supplied to industrial and industrial purposes. Subsequently, six drilling groups drilled about 700 springs in the city center, and also put in order all the springs and springs that were already available. The measure may seem somewhat superficial, but during the last battles for Breslau, the civilian population received water from them. To supply the city with water, materials and equipment that remained in the warehouses of well companies near the Freiburg railway station turned out to be very useful. These were mainly pumps, filters and pipes.

Special mention is worthy of the elimination of several major breakdowns in the hydraulic structures of the Vaida River dam. Each of these accidents threatened to leave the city completely without water. The complexity of the situation lay in the fact that during the day, due to the fact that this territory was well shot through by Soviet troops, repair was impossible. At night, it was difficult due to powerful bombardments. Accidents and breakdowns were a constant occurrence here. For this reason, a group of soldiers from the technical "company" was constantly near Vaida, who literally kept watch. A vigil could last up to two weeks. Only after that the group was changed.

In general, the technical staff of the Wehrmacht had to eliminate about 200 accidents per day - broken pipes, broken electrical wires, etc. Despite such a difficult situation, even not for the third month of the siege, electric current was supplied to the city. For its development, "internal reserves" of coal were sought. At first, it was sought out at all breweries and empty factories, then coal began to be supplied from two flooded barges.

The headquarters of the fortress began to pay special attention to sewers in Breslau almost from the first days of February 1945. This was caused not so much by the need for its maintenance, but by the danger of Soviet troops penetrating through it directly into the center of the city. For a number of reasons, this task could not be entrusted to sapper units, which, in addition, were poorly oriented in this extensive system. It required a very competent specialist. As a result, the commandant of the fortress left his choice on the figure of the city councilor for the construction of Liebig, who owned the entire

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necessary technical documentation. In the conditions of the German defense of Breslau, he was entrusted with the following important tasks:

- blocking the sewer to prevent the penetration of the Red Army;
- damming of meadows on the "northern" front;
- the use of sewers for laying telephone cables, which was supposed to protect against shelling and bombing;
- maintenance of sewerage for removal of melt water.

Looking ahead, we can say that all these tasks were successfully completed.

Liebig's cooperation with the Wehrmacht began on February 3, 1945, when he handed over sewerage schemes to the headquarters of the fortress. The next day, a sergeant major, a non-commissioned officer and five soldiers from the 2nd company of the 6th technical battalion were provided with his order.

Based on the general situation on the fronts, paramount attention was paid to the problem of access to sewer manholes, as well as getting into the sewer network itself. It was said that the Germans were afraid of the passage through them of Soviet saboteurs or

reconnaissance squads. As a first measure, most of the sewer manholes into the city were welded or riveted. At the most important of the sewer wells, they decided not to limit themselves to simply blocking the exit. Permanent posts were appointed there. In most cases, all these works were carried out at night. Their implementation was hampered by low-flying Soviet aircraft, which could focus on the reflections of lamps or welding to conduct aimed fire.

The next measure was the blocking of the sewer itself. This had to be done in such a way as not to interfere with the movement of effluents. To do this, usually sewer pipes were either sealed with masonry, in which small gaps were left, or they were selectively concreted. Similar measures were taken regularly throughout February 1945. Breslau himself had more than 500 kilometers of sewage at his "order". Approximately 75 kilometers had masonry, which actually formed the "channel".

The siege of Breslau was unthinkable without fire brigades, who, throughout the three months of fighting, tried to fight the fires raging in the city. In total, there were seven fire brigades in the city. Their numbers were 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8. During the battles, teams 5, and 7 ceased to exist. Numerous fires that did not subside for an hour led to the fact that the Breslau firefighters actually did not know the rest. They had to fight for almost every building in the city. The fires that broke out in the war zone had to be put up with. Under hurricane fire, they could hardly be extinguished. As a result, by May 1945, the southern and western regions of Breslau were one continuous ashes.

Firefighters paid special attention to public utilities, power plants, hydraulic structures, overcrowded hospitals and hospitals with wounded, the most significant public and historical buildings. In most cases, the fire had to be fought right under shelling and bombardment. For some time, the water that was poured from the fire hoses into the flames came from the central water supply system. But after interruptions began to occur in the work of the city water supply, firefighters had to be content with ponds, deep springs, as well as the city pit. As a result, it was decided to create twenty stationary tanks, into which water was pumped with special pumps. They were scattered throughout the city, which made it easier for firefighters. In order to protect the pipes leading from these tanks from explosions, they were laid in street ditches, or they were filled up along their entire length with piles of garbage, which, after the start of intensified bombing, was in abundance. In some cases, I had to go to tricks and improvise. So, for example, in some quarters of the city, pontoons acted as reservoirs for water. They were filled in the manner of settling ponds. Their only drawback was the need for regular repairs.

At the beginning of the siege, the city had no problems with hoses, they were in abundance. However, due to lack of time, they were not dried and repaired, which steadily led to their

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unsuitability. By the spring of 1945, the available stocks of hoses were either destroyed by bombardments, or ended up in the hands of the Red Army units, when fire brigades Nos. 5 and 7 were captured by the Soviets. Over time, a shortage of fuel began to be felt. For the operation of fire engines and for fire pumps, a special mixture was made. Its use was possible only after the carburetor was redesigned. The repair of fire engines was hampered by the fact that the fleet of team No. 7, which was located in the south of the city, was captured by Soviet troops, and spare shops were completely destroyed during the bombing. But, despite all these difficulties, firefighters appeared on the spot very quickly. The contact between the individual teams was established almost perfectly. However, he was supported mainly by army signalmen. In addition, a special operational team of messengers was made up of teenagers, whose tasks included coordinating the actions of individual teams already during the extinguishing of fires.

If we talk about losses, then among firefighters they amounted to 75 killed and 83 wounded. With a total of 600 fire brigades, this was a considerable percentage of losses (29%), especially when you consider that it was not combat units that fought on the front lines. Of the 44 vehicles at the disposal of the fire brigades, 18 were destroyed during the shelling and bombing, and another 8 received significant damage and were virtually beyond repair. However, every fire engine had breakdowns. During the bloody "Easter battle", which was accompanied by a hurricane of Soviet artillery fire, firefighters managed to localize several fires, preventing Breslau from turning into one continuous fire. But to resist all the fires in the April days of 1945, the fire brigades, which suffered constant losses, were beyond their strength.

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Chapter 7

Easter in Germany in 1945 fell on April 1st. Even the feeling of the approaching holiday could not change the mood among the inhabitants of Breslau. Rolf Becker wrote about the days leading up to Easter:

"Every day, as soon as the guns fall silent for a few minutes, the Soviet loudspeakers immediately turn on. But now the tone of appeals to the defenders and residents of Breslau is somewhat different. We are given to understand that if the fortress continues to resist, it will be destroyed to the ground by all the military forces at the disposal of the Soviets ... The ruins of the streets of what was once one of the most beautiful cities in Germany suggest that the threats sounding from the speakers are not an exaggeration.

As if in anticipation of a huge disaster, despite all the prohibitions, word of mouth begins to work in the city. On March 31, Good Saturday, Hugo Ertung wrote in his diary:

"For a long time, rumors have been circulating that the Russians have decided to make Breslau an Easter gift to their leadership. Over the past couple of days, artillery shelling has intensified. From twin-engine aircraft they began to drop bombs of such magnitude as we have not seen until now.

It is better to tell one of the eyewitnesses about the events on Easter night itself:

"Suddenly everything changes. A hurricane fire begins, which in its strength surpasses all the shelling that we have managed to survive so far. Squadrons of bombers appear in the sky, dropping bombs on our roofs."

Bombing and artillery shelling were accompanied by propaganda actions. Leaflets were dropped from the sky, and Soviet loudspeakers were again broadcasting from the streets adjacent to the front. Buchholz recalled:

"Sounding calls in German to overthrow the Hitlerite system were heard even from the air, from airplanes."

Ernst Hornig in his memoirs recalled:

"The events of those Easter days can hardly be expressed in words. For this, words are too weak a means. What happened exceeded all our even worst fears. "Easter turned into hell for Breslau," one of my church employees wrote.

As already mentioned, Easter Sunday in 1945 fell on April 1st. On that day, Soviet artillery (including large-caliber 280 mm guns) unleashed a flurry of fire on the city. Under the cover of artillery, Soviet heavy tanks headed towards the Gandau airfield. As a result of hurricane fire and bombing, German paratroopers became

suffer heavy losses. Due to the rising clouds of dust, the 20-millimeter twin automatic guns were unable to fire. Several German 88-mm anti-aircraft guns were destroyed by direct hits of Soviet shells in the very first hours of the offensive. Two hours after the start of the operation, the Soviet still began to approach the building of the boarding school for the blind. The headquarters of the regiment was located here, from where all the defense of these regions was organized. The reserve platoon, which was at the disposal of the regimental headquarters, was immediately sent to hold the territory between the boarding school for the blind and the Oder. At that moment, Lieutenant Colonel Mor still had contact with Major Tilgner, whose group was on the left flank. By virtue of its

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location, she did not suffer huge losses. In the end, she still received an order to retreat to the locks on the Oder. General Niehoff recalled that day:

"We were very surprised when the Russians, after their first major success, did not continue to advance on the right flank, moving further, but turned to the northeast in the direction of the sapper barracks. Meanwhile the night had come. Major Tilgner's group, which did not suffer any losses during the night, was delivered by trucks to the regiment. Of course, heavy guns had to be left at the locks. When the second day of Easter arrived, a new defensive line was created in the west. Later, when we were captured, we had a conversation with a staff officer from the army headquarters of General Gluzdovsky. When we asked why the Russians did not turn to the right in the second half of Easter Sunday after a successful breakthrough of our defense, the officer at first remained silent. Then he looked at the map and said, "We had other plans." It is obvious that the Russians simply could not take advantage of this unique chance.

Erich Schoenfelder, one of the few German survivors who took an active part in the defense of Breslau, recalled:

"In this hell, hardly anyone could be helped. Yes, and the help itself was essentially meaningless ... The most difficult thing was for Sandy Island. There was a huge bomb hole in the local church. The old church of St. Vincent, which housed the tombstone of Henry II, was completely engulfed in flames. The monastery of St. Ursuline was turned into ruins. About thirty weeping sisters prayed on their knees in front of the ruined temple. They no longer understood this world. Like beacons, the two towers of the cathedral burned with fire in the night. The glow of the conflagrations could be seen far beyond Breslau. Like fire drops, the burnt-out pieces of the towers collapse into the water, which reflects the riot of fires. Old Breslau ceased to exist."

According to rough estimates, only on April 1, 1945, about 5 thousand bombs were dropped on the city. On the second day of the Easter week, the intensified bombardments temporarily ceased. But this did not stop the numerous fires.

At night, the bombers replaced the U-2 aircraft, which were nicknamed by the Germans "sewing machines" for the characteristic sound of a running engine. From these small Soviet aircraft, tracer bullets were fired at the streets from a low altitude.

The fires in Breslau from the first days of April 1945 were so strong that even stones began to melt in the city. Hugo Ertung in his diaries described the events of Easter week as follows:

"Hot from the heat, the bell begins to ring. Easter Bell Breslau. Our backyard is on fire. In hot whirlwinds, wood melts almost instantly. Pillars of fiery sparks ascend to the sky to fall on neighboring roofs and give life to new fires. The entire second day of Easter is marked by a fiery nightmare."

One of the evangelical priests recalled those days:

"We believed that the hour of the Last Judgment had come for us."

It is difficult even to imagine how unbearable the situation of the civilians of the city was. Hugo Ertung reported:

"We walk around forever sleepy and dirty. The pump can no longer supply water, and our eyes are pockmarked with smoke. Everyone has one thought in their heads - it would end faster. "

When the evening of April 2 came, the entire city center was burned out. Rolf Becker recalled the "Easter battle":

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"Defensive battles in the first weeks of April reached their climax in their fierceness. In the area of the boarding school for the blind, the position is held by Mora's battle-tested regiment. But he, too, is steadily losing his strength... Fights are going on near the Pöpelwitz station. There, the Russians shoot through literally every meter. Their powers are too great. More and more defenders are dying under their fire. Russian tanks break through the bridge over the Oder in a powerful spurt into the northern part of the city. Gradually, their advance stops. The battalion of paratroopers thrown into battle was almost completely destroyed. In the battles going on for several days, the Wuttke battalion, which held Posener- and Alsen-strasse, was mowed down. Soviet troops are slowly moving forward.

The fierceness of the fighting is also evidenced by the report of the commander of the assault gun, Lieutenant Hartman.

"The next day I was sent to a boarding school for the blind. Non-commissioned officer Mayer was with me with his assault gun. He was my old friend from the 3rd battery of the 311th brigade. In the basement of the orphanage, I found Captain Wulf, whose command post was located in this building. He commanded a battalion of the Hitler Youth. He informed me that the Russian tanks were to be deployed in the park, which was located north of the boarding school for the blind. At the indicated place, I came across teenagers from the Hitler Youth who came out to conduct reconnaissance. I crawled with my gunner to a fallen tree. Carefully peering between the branches, we found that an armored giant was standing 150-200 meters from us. It was about an assault howitzer, whose caliber was 152 millimeters. We quickly returned to our assault gun and rode until we had a clearing in front of us. In the intercom, I gave the order to the driver: "Take it to the left." A few seconds later, the gunner reported: "Completely ready." "Fire," I commanded. At that moment, the Russians noticed us and began to lower the barrel of the gun. But it was too late. There was a shot from our cannon, which hit the ears, but at least somehow calmed the nerves. I saw flames shoot out of the barrel. The first shot hit the target. Something popped to my right. When I looked out of the hatch in surprise, I found that my friend Mayer's gun had supported me with fire. The Russian tank was on fire. The boys from the Hitler Youth enthusiastically pointed to another Russian tank, which had taken cover a little further down the clearing. I aimed my assault gun closer to the trees and covered it with fire. The Russian did not move, but did not catch fire either. When at the next shot the cartridge case jammed, the brave boys helped to extract it. On this day, the Russians could not advance further in this direction. But still, during the subsequent battles, the building of the boarding school for the blind had to be surrendered. Now the front line passed along the western outskirts of the city. Unfortunately, we lacked heavy self-propelled guns. Our assault guns could not keep up where they were needed. The loss of the Gandau airfield had a very painful effect on the supply of ammunition to our units. We were forced to save shells. Under these conditions, we could only rely on ammunition that was dropped from the air. Based on experience, they were parachuted down three blocks from the Russian positions. But even under these conditions, I never once reported the impossibility of participating in battles due to a lack of shells. Our unit commander, Oberleutnant Retter, was indefatigable in his search for dropped ammunition that would fit our guns. He didn't hesitate to personally deliver them."

During this "Easter battle", a whole avalanche of bombs and shells fell on the western districts of Breslau, which turned numerous houses into fragments of construction debris. The city was engulfed in fire.

General Niehof wrote:

"Despite this, the enemy could not break either the defense or the will of the defenders of the fortress."

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Even under this hurricane bombardment, civilian institutions continued to operate, which were responsible for the supply of water, electricity and telephone communications. It is significant that only in these terrible conditions did the last tram stop running. What did the Soviet troops achieve during the Easter assault? They were able to penetrate from the west into the German positions for about 2-3 kilometers. The Gandau airfield was also taken by the Red Army, which was a very serious loss for the whole of Breslau. From that moment on, the wounded could not be taken out of the city by plane. Overcrowded military hospitals have become a real torment for both patients and staff. But in this situation it seems strange that the Soviet troops did not develop their offensive using powerful assault groups. It is possible that the Soviet command in their actions was fettered by the "southern" and "northern" fronts. For the Germans, these battles ended with a small gift. Secret documents fell into their hands, which made it possible to track all the radio communications of the Red Army units. The Soviet command, apparently, did not even notice the loss of these documents, since radio communications continued at the same frequencies with the same call signs. As a result, the headquarters of the Breslau fortress received information in advance about all the operations planned by the Soviet waxes, and General Niehof had time to resort to effective countermeasures.

After Easter, the Soviet offensive on the "Western" front was more like an uncontrolled forest fire. On the southern flank, the blow had to be held by the Khanf regiment, who after March 24 again became the regiment commander. He replaced the wounded Colonel Felhagen, who was flown to Breslau in early March. After fierce fighting, it was decided to blow up the railway dam of the Posen bridge. But by April 11, the Germans managed to recapture the area located south of the Nikoitorsky railway station from the Soviet troops. From this sector, held by the Hanf-Velhagen regiment, the front along the railway line passed along the right flank of the Besslein regiment (Grebschener and Victoria Strasse). Here it makes sense to give the floor to Lieutenant Hartman, since he not only described in his memoirs the actions of his assault guns, but also gave a general picture of the then battles. By that time, Hartman himself had been awarded the Knight's Cross for his services:

"The Russians attacked us on the left bank of the Oder. It seems that their goal was to move along the Oder, in order to then hit the city center with a wedge. Non-commissioned officer Mayer and I were located directly behind the front line. When the artillery and mortar fire intensified, we left our basement on Eichenpark Strasse and began to climb towards the harbor along Pöpelwitz Strasse in the direction of Promnitzer Strasse. Through the gardens and meadows, which were located between the boarding school for the blind and the oak grove, several enemy self-propelled artillery mounts were driving in our direction. We opened fire on them with all guns. One installation had a broken caterpillar. Another artillery mount was steadily approaching and began to approach me from the right flank. I used up all my ammunition and called for Mayer's help. He was able to set fire to the Russian giant with the last shell. The rest preferred to retire to the forest. Suddenly, one of the tanks again left the forest and rushed to the building of the boarding school for the blind. The Russians tried to tow their downed comrade. Several thrown grenades forced them to abandon this intention. Thank God, the Russians no longer tried to attack, but only fired from the forest. Despite the lack of ammunition, we stopped at Pepelwitz Straße to give our soldiers at least moral support. By this time it was already noon. Suddenly there was a horn. I looked out of the hatch and saw that behind my car was a Volkswagen that brought lunch. I shouted to the driver: "If you are only with food, then disappear! We are not hungry. We don't have enough ammo." He frightened away. But our downtime did not last long - soon shells were brought to us. Now we are moving forward and

finished off a Russian tank stuck at a boarding school for the blind. In the evening we received reinforcements in the person of the company commander, Lieutenant Fentske. The next day was much calmer. However, I was still able to knock out three Russian anti-tank guns that were occupying positions north of the boarding school.

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One of the following days, uniform fireworks began. Then I was able to knock out a Russian tank and an anti-tank gun on Pöpelwitz Strasse. Despite this, the Russians still managed to move forward up to the estate, which was located at the corner of Pöpelwitz and Prominzer Strasse ... They also took an oak grove. Due to the fact that the enemy actively used flamethrowers, none of our counterattacks were successful. On April 7 or 8, the Russians already completely controlled the oak grove. Unfortunately, on this day we lost our comrade, non-commissioned officer Mayer. His assault gun was knocked out, with several fragments lodged in Mayer's lungs. He was placed in a military hospital, where he died of his wounds a few days later. I visited him shortly before his death to inform him that he had been promoted to the rank of sergeant major. This was his last joy in life. An hour later he was gone. Probably, death saved him from the suffering to which he would have been doomed in Soviet captivity.

While on the overpass on Pöpelitz Strasse, I was able to knock out another Russian tank in an oak grove. He stood next to the garden pavilion. On April 10, I left Criske Strasse with my assault gun and moved to Posener Strasse. Shortly before this, the company commander was wounded in the head, and therefore I had to lead the entire armored combat group. On April 18, we were awakened by the beginning of a hurricane shelling. At the command post, where I immediately rushed to find out the situation, Lieutenant Colonel More was very angry. The entrance to the barracks was half destroyed. A Russian unexploded shell protruded from the wall. I believe its caliber was 280 millimeters. The headquarters of the regiment was in turmoil. It turned out that the Russians, with the support of tanks, were able to escape from the oak grove and took the railway embankment. But my three assault guns were ready for battle. We immediately got on our way. From the moment I led the battle group, I had to transfer to the IV assault tank, which was equipped with a gun from the Panther. When we reached the railway line, which ran from Long Lane along Gnezner Straße to the Odertor station, we came under heavy artillery and mortar fire, which intensified every minute. I stopped on the highway near the Pöpelwitz stop. Through the periscope, I began to study the garden area. There I noticed spotted giants with 152mm guns. I hit the first of them without any problems, it was immediately engulfed in fire. The long gun from the "Panther" made it possible to shoot at decent distances. This was followed by another, and then another. More and more steel monsters became visible. They didn't understand what was happening. I had the feeling that we were firing at practice firing. When I had completely used up my ammunition, numerous Russian tanks burned like torches. Five of them were on my account. The battle was continued by the assault guns accompanying me. High on the railroad embankment I spotted a Russian tank. I spotted the flash of a gunshot before I could return and resupply my ammo. On the way back, I came across two assault guns that were supposed to hold positions on the front line at night. I considered them destroyed. They, like me, completely used up all the shells when the Russian offensive began. Now I could safely go for ammunition. I quickly loaded the shells in the courtyard of the Judicial Jail and rushed forward without delay. At the command post, I spotted Lieutenant Colonel More. He asked for a ride. He didn't even take off his cap. When we arrived at the marked road fork, the Russian fire became so intense that I asked the colonel to come back with one of the R7P tanks. At this point, new Russian tanks appeared. I was able to knock out two of them. During a short break, some Oberleutnant jumped on my gun and shouted that I was the embodiment of tank death. During this battle, other assault guns knocked out five more Russian tanks. We ourselves did not suffer any losses, except for my antenna, which was shot down by a shell fragment. In the heat of battle, I did not even notice that the Russians were also firing at us. It was a truly wonderful day. However, he does not

ended. We launched a counterattack, during which I once again shot all the shells. The ammunition had to be delivered to the unit commander Oberleutnant Retter. He told me that my progress was reported to the headquarters of the fortress. At 15 o'clock, a new counterattack was launched by the forces of the Hitler Youth battalion. With our support, he was able to recapture the railway embankment from the Russians. Closer

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in the evening we found an enemy tank that had fallen into a bomb crater and could not get out of it. It could be seen only if you get close to the funnel. Without suspecting anything, we climbed onto the giant, who stood almost vertically on the edge of the funnel. I was developing a plan to remove this tank without damaging it. I asked 30 Volkssturmists to try to pull the tank out of the crater. I entrusted the execution of this task to non-commissioned officer Kunert. I myself went to the command post to Lieutenant Colonel More to receive a new assignment. When I arrived there, the non-commissioned officer Kunert reported that, it turned out, the Russian crew remained in the tank, which at the first opportunity opened fire from the gun. Half of Kunert's face was burned by fire from a close shot. I immediately rushed forward. When we arrived, despite all the calls, the crew of the tank did not intend to surrender. The Russians tried to shoot back and throw hand grenades. After that, they had to be shot from Faustpatrons. It was our thirteenth Soviet tank knocked out during that day of fighting. This incident shows how fierce the fighting was. Later, I wondered more than once why the crew did not leave their tank and chose to fight to the very end. I believe that the unit commander was in this tank. Early in the morning, during the offensive of the Russian tank unit, the commander's car fell into a funnel. Apparently, at the moment when the Russian tankers lost contact with the command tank, I just gave the order to my assault guns to open fire on them. The Russian commander, who learned about the destruction of his unit, chose not to return to his own and decided to die in battle. Meanwhile, the Russians tried unsuccessfully to attack our positions from the Nikolaitorovsky railway station along the Pozener railway bridge. During the defensive battles, a total of 25 Russian tanks were knocked out here. In those days, my name was even mentioned in the summary of the fortress. And for some reason I was promoted to "anti-tank defense lieutenant." Meanwhile, from the papers of the murdered officer, we learned that the main goal of the Russians was Bondarnaya Square, located on the other side of the Oder.

During the fighting that continued during the first days of April 1945 on the "western" front, Volkssturm battalions were also actively used. The Hitler Youth battalions (55th and 56th) took part in the battles near the Rüttger enterprises and the Pöpelwitz station. A little later, the "railway battalion" Pyocha (74th) formed in February joined them. The railwaymen's good knowledge of the area helped them during the battles for the Mohrburn marshalling yard. The 21st Battalion of the Volkssturm, commanded by the Guards Jaeger Pflanz, took part in the battles at Diehernfurt from the beginning of January. In April he was sent to reinforce the Hanf-Velhagen regiment. The 68th battalion of Volkssturmists participated in the battles on the bridgehead near Nikolaitor (Nikolaev Gates). On the night of April 18-19, he lost his commander Kaisling. After that, he became subordinate to Major Klose, who at first commanded the 41st Volkssturm Battalion, and then received one of the army battalions under his command. Klose himself was awarded the Knight's Cross for his bravery.

Over time, the Soviet troops still managed to take control of the railway embankment near the Nikolaitorovsky railway station. But this tactical success was associated with huge losses in the Red Army. First of all, this concerned heavy tanks. In many ways, the situation resembled the assault on the railway embankment on the "southern" front. The only difference was that the Germans still managed to create a defensive line and special shelters in the dam. However, even here they clearly did not have enough manpower to complete the construction of a full-fledged line of defense. Despite the fact that the railway embankment was recaptured, the German defense was not completely broken. The Soviet troops never managed to reach their

the main goal at that time was to capture Bondarnaya Square in the northern part of Breslau. As General Niehoff noted:

"Among other things, our resistance increased as we took advantage of the dense urban development. We actively used the experience we gained in street fighting on the southern outskirts of the city."

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In addition, the Germans once again carried out a regrouping of forces. On April 21, 1945, Mora's regiment was withdrawn from the front line, which took part in all the battles from the very beginning of the "Easter battle" without respite. He was replaced by the SS Besslein regiment transferred from the south.

Meanwhile, the command of the fortress clearly understood that the difficulties would increase every day. The main ones were irreplaceable losses and lack of ammunition. Even the use of "Breslau mortars" did not save the situation. General Niehoff and his lieutenants increasingly gave orders to avoid fighting if possible. Every cartridge and every projectile counted.

If we talk about the construction of the internal airfield "Kaiser Strasse", then not a single plane could land on this "clearing". At best, a cargo glider could land here. When the lack of ammunition became so acute that the headquarters of the fortress calculated every day whether the artillerymen could "spend" 20 or 30 shells (and this is for the whole city!), General Niehof contacted the command of the 17th Army and asked for the support of combat aviation. When the skies were clear, German aircraft could support counterattacks from the Breslau defenders from the air. It was not only a matter of causing damage to units of the Red Army. Among the defenders of Breslau, the opinion began to spread (by the way, not unfounded) that they were left to the mercy of fate. The Luftwaffe vehicles that appeared in the sky were supposed to warm up the ghostly hope of release among the soldiers and the civilian population. The commandant of the fortress did not dare to deprive people of their last hope. He regularly visited military hospitals and personally awarded distinguished soldiers. But the forces of the encircled German group were dwindling every day. In April, it was necessary to seek poloneniya again. As a result, about 120 orderlies in military hospitals changed their dressing gowns to a rifle over their shoulders. All of them were distributed among various divisions - replenishment was required everywhere. At one time, an artillery battalion was separated into an independent unit. It was made up of the most experienced officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers. Due to the obvious lack of ammunition, the commander of the fortress artillery Urbatis proposed to divide them between the infantry units.

In mid-April 1945, Colonel Sauer sent the battalion commanded by Wuttke from the "northern" to the "western" front. The positions of the departed unit were taken by the reserve battalion of the training regiment of Count Seydlitz (adjutant - Lieutenant Schoenfelder). The creation of this regiment in many ways made it possible to prepare reserves that were so necessary for the fortress. Count Seidlitz himself died on May 2, 1945 during the fighting on the "northern" front. By the end of April, only the 2nd training battalion remained in reserve at the fortress.

The active shelling of the city by Soviet artillery sometimes led to unforeseen consequences. So, for example, in April, the Sandy Bridge mined by the Germans exploded. However, this turned out to be the only case of unforeseen detonation of charges laid under bridges and overpasses. After this incident, Lieutenant Schultz, commander of the technical support company, had to restore the Sandy Bridge, which was very important for the German defense. Among other things, it was important for supplying German units on the front lines and maintaining telephone communications. During the restoration work, Schulze proposed to the commandant of the fortress to clear the 16 bridges and overpasses remaining inside the city. This was the only way to avoid their unforeseen destruction. The proposal was accepted, since there had long been no tactical need to destroy the bridges in the center

cities. As a result of demining, the released sappers were sent to infantry units.

When we talked about the calming down of fighting on the "southern" front, this did not mean at all that the 609th division was not at all subjected to any attacks from the Red Army. The division was perhaps the most valuable and powerful reserve, which was strictly forbidden to withdraw to the western sector of the front. The division itself had minimal reserves - such was the half-platoon commanded by Lieutenant Benshe. In the zoological garden, since February 1945, Major Jung, who had commanded one of the Volkssturm regiments, arranged something like a "rest home". There, the German soldiers, who were temporarily serving from the front line, could rest for a short time. By this time, the Soviet units did not dare to attack through

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the flooded Ole Valley. Only small reconnaissance sorties were undertaken here, to repel which the forces of the Volkssturmists were quite enough.

In April 1945, Captain Mooshacke received the long-awaited news. He himself remembered this So:

"My wife and children, hiding from the Russian offensive, moved from Eastern Pomerania to Dresden. I was already in Breslau when I learned that Dresden had been completely destroyed. Since then, I have not had any information about my family. One night, a German plane was shot down over the Breslau main station. The pilot managed to parachute out of the burning car. He landed just outside the command post of our division. He was immediately delivered to us. The first thing he asked me was if I knew Captain Mooshacke. To the answer that I was the one, he gave me a letter from my wife. So I received the news that my family was able to escape from the burning Dresden.

In our story, we mainly pay attention to the "southern" and "western" fronts, in fact bypassing the northern sector. Meanwhile, it was of considerable strategic importance. Being on the other side of the Oder, he was, in the words of General Niehoff, "an umbrella for Breslau." As the Germans managed to more or less successfully repel the attacks of the Red Army in the south and west, the desire of the Soviet command to "close this umbrella" grew. If the Red Army men managed to break through the German defenses north of Breslau, this would have catastrophic consequences for the defenders of the fortress. However, the "northern" fronts withstood all the attacks of the Soviet troops.

On the left flank, where the positions were limited by the Oder, and, accordingly, south of the Oder, battles were also fought. After the Besslein regiment was thrown back from Weistrinz on February 23, 1945, the positions of the Sauer regiment were also moved back. After the successful regrouping of the "Tilgner battle group", which was part of the Mohr regiment, the left wing of the Sauer regiment was pushed back during the "Easter battle" up to the Ransener locks. However, this regiment, until the very end of the defense of Breslau, held positions on the southern bank of the Oder, where it was constantly subjected to Soviet attacks from the flanks.

Along with the Sauer regiment, the Wel regiment, which was slightly to the right, fought on this sector of the front, which, after being transferred from the "southern" front, was supposed to hold the northern borders of the city. The "artillery group North", commanded by Major Hartl, was also actively used here. It consisted of six batteries - three batteries of German field howitzers, one - German heavy howitzers, as well as two captured batteries, equipped with Italian and Polish 75-mm guns. "Artillery Group North" very advantageously used the local landscape, which allowed it to operate successfully even in conditions of limited ammunition. The location of the German artillery batteries was so advantageous that they could withstand the Soviet artillery. An example is the battery of Lieutenant Siegrat, who occupied positions in Kleinau. She was destroyed

one of the Soviet mortar batteries that tried to start shelling German positions south of Ruksa. The secret of this tactical success of the Germans was the coordinated actions of all branches of the armed forces. This is what made it possible to keep the "umbrella" over the northern regions of the fortress in an "open" state.

Meanwhile, the city itself was reduced to ruins. On the events of April 1945 Rolf Becker recalled:

"The city center from the Knight's Bridge to Eneglsburg is burned to the ground ... Around the New Market are the ruins of houses and the skeletons of buildings, which miraculously hold their pediments. The Soviets held back their threats. They destroyed Breslau and then plowed up the rubble. One can only speculate about the number of deaths. Above the ruins of the scorched Ring, the building of the town hall, built in the Gothic style, rises alone.

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Vera Krause, who was forced to change her shelter several times during the advance of the Soviet troops in early March, recalled the "nightmare of Easter 1945":

"On Saturday, on the eve of the celebration of Easter, house number 67 along Hirschlandstrasse collapsed completely. Berbel and I were in the hallway during the bombardment. Corpses were scattered around us, but nothing happened to us... After that, my child and I tried to find shelter in the cellar. But because of the threat of fires, I decided to make my way to the barracks in Rosenthal, where my husband was. All night, holding the hand of my girl, I wandered through the streets engulfed in flames. The raging fire left only a little space for passage. Sometimes the streets were completely blocked by fires. But we walked on them without feeling fear. Could fear help in this situation? On Tuesday at about 7:45 we reached the barracks in Rosenthal. My husband was unspeakably glad to see us, because he did not know if we were still alive in the burning city. We settled in a small apartment in a house located next to the barracks. I found some work in them. Now we, as soldiers, received rations. During work, Berbel was always by my side. I didn't leave her unattended for even a minute."

The fire brigade that existed in the city could not do anything with the rampant fire element. But this did not stop the German firefighters themselves from waging their own war on fire for weeks on end. Most of the fire engines and the teams themselves were located in a building in Weidenstrasse. By April 1945, this entire fire brigade consisted of only 9 people who continued to do their job. For the convenience of extinguishing fires in each of the districts, special tanks were created. Since this German city was almost not subjected to air raids until the encirclement of Breslau in February 1945, most of the fire engines were transferred to Dresden, which was actually swept from the face of the earth by Anglo-American air raids. It would seem that the Breslau firefighters should have shrugged, but, as eyewitnesses noted, this was not the case. Starting from mid-February, they tried to put out fires at least in the most significant buildings. Moreover, all this was done under the fire of Soviet artillery or in the immediate vicinity of the places of street fighting. In the end, there is nothing surprising in the fact that the German firefighters suffered losses. However, soon the city began to experience a shortage of water. Water pipes were destroyed in most areas, and therefore it was possible to immediately abandon the idea of connecting hoses to fire hydrants. As a result, German firefighters had to pull hoses for a thousand or even more meters.

By mid-April, food supply problems began to be felt in Breslau. First of all, this affected the civilian population, among which a variety of diseases began to spread. There was a danger of an epidemic. Among other things, the civilians themselves were already engulfed in one epidemic, which eyewitnesses called the "basement disease." It was about endless nervous breakdowns, which often happened to people who spent whole weeks in basements and cellars.

The result of fierce and bloody fighting in the first ten days of April was the expansion of Soviet positions in the western regions of Breslau. By April 11, the German defense line was already running along the railway dam of the Poznań railway bridge and further south to the Nikolaytor railway station. During the offensive, units of the Red Army were able not only to recapture the Gandau airfield from the Germans, but also to go deep in this direction for 2 kilometers into German positions. As a result, the Soviet units were located 2200 meters from the inner ring of the city. Some 500 meters separated them from Strigauer Platz.

Almost all German units were driven back from the outskirts to the city center at the end of March. Only one battalion from the Hanfa regiment managed to gain a foothold in Mariahöfchen, a small village located south of the Gandau airfield. However, in the first week of April, this unit was also withdrawn to the southeast. One of the soldiers of this battalion recalled:

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"During the Easter holidays on this sector of the front, we took part in fierce battles. But since a major offensive was launched from the west, during which Gandau was captured, we were forced to change positions. We were sent to fight at the bunker located near Strigauer Platz. The positions of my company passed along Berlinskaya, Poznańskaya streets and ended on Friedrich Wilhelm Street. The command post of our battalion was also located there. It was located in the basement of the Weltbühne establishment. We managed to hold these positions until the very surrender.

The bloody battles of the first days of April, among other things, resulted in a significant increase in the number of wounded. All military hospitals were filled with them. Nobody could take them out by plane. Worst of all had the wounded, who were located in ground bunkers. In the hospitals located there, there were from 1,000 to 1,500 people who were stacked in tight rows right on the floor. Konrad Büchsel, who visited one of the hospitals daily, described the picture that appeared to his eyes as follows:

"Nurses work in the most terrible conditions. Lights in the hospital are switched on only for 6 hours a day. It is during these hours, when electricity is supplied, ventilation of the premises is possible. On the upper floors the temperature reaches 35°. Real care for the wounded is hardly possible, since there is not even the possibility of maintaining even a semblance of cleanliness.

It seemed that in a single German city the End of the World had come.

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Chapter 8 About the last stage of the battles for Breslau, General Niehof recalled the following:

"With an undoubted numerical superiority in armament and manpower during the "Easter battle", the enemy recaptured the Gandau airfield from us, which he had long been striving for. Despite the fact that we had a tough will and the best organization of the forces mobilized for the defense of the city, the cessation of defense was only a matter of time.

The situation could not be corrected even by the regrouping carried out, when Mora's regiment, which had suffered huge losses, was replaced on April 21 by the more recent Besslein SS regiment.

Even in this critical situation, the grassroots cells of the NSDAP continue to operate, which are trying to determine the place of residence of the population constantly migrating around the city. On April 14 Herman Novak wrote in his diary:

"Found my son. The Karlovits family cell settled us in an apartment at No. 64 Corso Alley. It's amazing that they're still doing business and trying to take care of us."

Since each of the inhabitants of Breslau could die at any time in a fire or under the rubble of houses, the inhabitants themselves are trying to take some security measures. April 15 Novak wrote:

"In the afternoon, there was a meeting of the tenants living in the triangle formed by Stren, Fürsten and Hansa Strasse. It was decided to create a firewall, which would have to track fires and watch the falls of houses. This is the only way to reduce the risk of being buried under the rubble."

At this time, it was decided to involve children in the defense of the city. An eyewitness recalled:

"My heart bled when I saw 10-year-old boys who were supposed to go to the front. They carried a rifle on their shoulders, which dragged along the ground behind them.

The question begs itself, did Wehrmacht officers really consider such a practice to be normal? But the fact remains that the clearer the hopeless position of Breslau became, the tighter became the control over the employees of the Wehrmacht and the civilian population. In mid-April, Novak wrote:

"There are military patrols everywhere. Nobody trusts anyone. It is not enough to have documents issued by the local party cell, now you need to know a special password."

This control was strictest in the city center and on the border with the northern districts of Breslau. The fact is that it was in the north that numerous deserters sought refuge. After bombings were carried out at party offices, the northern districts are considered "politically troubled".

A special case that could be left aside if it did not show how striking the difference between the individual districts of Breslau was. In mid-April 1945, Hugo Ertung was sent to the Karlowitz Monastery, where he was supposed to take care of the deployment of military groups. He immediately felt the difference between the constantly bombed, completely destroyed city center and its northern suburbs. He wrote in his diary:

"Just yesterday, on the dirty streets of the ruined city center, a supply of burning and decomposed bodies hit me in the nose. There I had to constantly squeeze between the barricades,

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built from furniture and tram cars. Here I smelled the scent of flowers, heard the buzzing of bees, and saw blossoming trees and blossoming flowers."

The heavy losses that the units of the Red Army suffered during the months of street fighting became the reason that at the final stage of the battle for Breslau, the Soviet command preferred to limit itself to military operations only on two fronts: "southern" and "western". At the same time, the situation on the "northern" and "eastern" fronts was more than calm. Hugo Ertung, who found himself in the sulfuric areas of the city, described his own observations and experiences in his diary:

"There is a complete calm at the moment on our northern front. By telephone, I only occasionally receive reports of small reconnaissance parties that are crossing to the opposite bank of the Vaida River. The same is observed on the Russian coast. The only major event was the "sewing machine" hated by our soldiers, shot down from a carbine. Two Soviet pilots with round, well-fed faces were sent to the command post. After that, I saw how they sat indifferently on a bench in the alley and smoked cigarettes. They definitely know that their captivity will not last long."

Under these conditions, the futile and senseless erection of an airstrip in the center of the city becomes a barometer of public sentiment. Now even decrepit old people "work" here. Novak described in his diary the scene in which 76-year-old women were forced to saw through vast oak trees. Trees, as it turned out, were required in order to strengthen the vaults of the cellars and prevent them from collapsing during the bombardments. But in fact, such precautions were in vain, since the bomb that got into the house pierced it almost through and exploded in the basement, burying everyone in it.

On April 16, 1945, an appeal was published for all girls and women aged 16 to 35 to volunteer to serve in the Wehrmacht, thereby freeing men who worked in headquarters and military offices to participate in the battles. Soon Wehrmacht assistants who wore military uniforms became commonplace in Breslau. They could be found everywhere on the streets. Alphonse Buchholz remarked on this subject:

"A separate problem for families was the need to worry not only about sons who were drafted into the army, but also about daughters. The path to the army departments was most densely fired upon by the Russians.

Notable ARE the considerations that Buchholz shared with his diary a few days later:

"Did Commandant Breslau not foresee the hopelessness of this struggle? How many human lives and property could be saved. No matter how much horror and grief we do not know. The fortresses of Glogau, Königsberg, and Vienna have long since fallen. Probably, in the near future, a similar fate awaits Berlin.

These thoughts indicate that by mid-April, the need for the city's surrender was obvious to many people. But at the same time, the commandant of the fortress was not "free" in his decisions. On the manifestation of independence, he decided only after the death of Hitler.

The population ceases to understand why such a long defense of Breslau was required. Every day information about the advance of Soviet troops to Berlin and the military successes of the Anglo-American allies in the western regions of Germany reach the civilians. Against the backdrop of this disturbing news, even everyday worries and difficulties, which were an invariable phenomenon of everyday life in the besieged "fortress", receded. Meanwhile, the patience of the Soviet command, which expected Breslau to capitulate in April 1945, ended. For this reason, increased shelling and bombardment of the city began again.

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Now almost all areas of Breslau were subjected to them. Soviet troops began to plan an attack on the city from the north-west, therefore they subjected the Odertor quarter to a powerful shelling. One of the nurses recalled this day:

"April 18th. The morning began with the fact that at 6 o'clock a hurricane of fire from Russian and German guns began. The shelling of the territory went on hour after hour, only occasionally interrupted for a few minutes. One can feel the terrifying hits of large-caliber shells and the raging of Stalin's organs. Our house shook to its very foundations. However, we continued to do our work on the lower floors. We must thank the Almighty for His merciful protection during these terrible hours ... There is no light in the house and the bunker. In the evening it became calmer, and we decided to turn on the pump to pump the water we needed.

The constant destruction in fires and shelling of furniture and household utensils gave rise to the problem of the so-called escheated property. In addition, a significant part of the surviving furniture was used to build barricades. Buchholz described that the death of good things made the most painful impression on people living in poverty. He wrote:

"If authorized party functionaries arrived at the scene to announce this event, many noticed that they carried some things not towards the barricades, but into the basements where their offices were located. The opinion began to spread among the population that things should not be preserved for their former owners, and therefore they can be treated at their own discretion. Therefore, many of the things were sorted out before a group of party officials arrived at the scene. The most decent people began to turn to priests. They began to issue a certificate stating that if they wanted to keep the thing for its previous owners, they could take it away, provided that it would be returned later. This was the moral principle of using someone else's property: *Kez sitaŭ ai otitis* - every thing cries out to its owner, that is, other people's things remain in the custody of a certain person until their true owner is discovered.

If you think about the fact that the "fortress" of Breslau, after being surrounded for more than two months, could withstand the superior forces of the Red Army, then the question involuntarily begs: how was this possible? This could happen for a number of reasons. Firstly, the Germans, who were on the defensive, quickly adapted to the tactics of the actions of the Soviet troops. Therefore, the obvious superiority of the Red Army in manpower and equipment was compensated by the fact that its units suffered huge losses in street battles. This, in turn, was the result not only of the Germans' good knowledge of the terrain, but also of the use of flexible defense tactics. Secondly, the lack of ammunition among the Germans was compensated by the manufacture of the so-called "temporary weapons", which could well be successfully used in defense. In addition, one should not discount the fact that the steadily shrinking ring of the Soviet encirclement around Breslau made it possible to improve the coordination of actions between individual German units, as well as increase the density of defensive fire by one conventional meter of the front. And, finally, a number of psychological attitudes were of the greatest importance for the Breslau defenders. Fear of "Russian captivity" and "sending to Siberia" forced many German soldiers to immediately abandon the idea of voluntary surrender. This circumstance might seem insignificant, but, nevertheless, the sources indicate that it was it that "added strength and courage" to the defenders of Breslau. For the same reason, Soviet propaganda - leaflets and appeals through loudspeakers - did not have the proper effect on German soldiers (we are talking about military personnel, not civilians). Novak, in his notes, expressed this idea as follows:

"Only the horror of Russian captivity keeps them still at the front."

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Such a formulation may seem somewhat primitive, but, apparently, at the end of the battles for Breslau, things were exactly that way.

German soldiers and the civilian population of the city increasingly began to wonder: "What awaits us in the future." On April 20, Novak wrote in his diary:

"Total hopelessness. Will the Russians take us to their place, as Hitler and his henchmen did in other countries when they destroyed families? Germany is not a very large country, but Russia is huge... A chill runs through my skin from the mere thought of whether I am destined to meet my family again.

In Breslau, as well as throughout Germany, they no longer believed in a turning point in the course of the war, or even in its relatively successful conclusion, similar to that achieved by Frederick the Great as a result of the Seven Years' War. Everyone understood that the "wonder weapon", thanks to which the Fuhrer would save the country, was a bluff and an illusion. Even many officers began to come to the idea of the hopelessness of the situation. Nevertheless, in the reports of the Wehrmacht command on April 18-19, the following was stated:

"Fierce defensive battles continue on the western front of Breslau ... The brave defenders of Breslau repelled the newly launched Russian attacks on the southern and western fronts."

In mid-April, the issue of releasing the fortress was again raised, which had been promised long ago by Field Marshal Schörner to General Niehof. The terms of the upcoming "salvation" of the city were each time postponed indefinitely. Despite this unfortunate circumstance for the Germans, some of them did not lose hope. In his notes Hugo Hartung

wrote:

"At night I once again passed in front of my house. I noticed a separate group of officers. One of them said that the other day he was at the commandant of the fortress, General Niehof. In conversation, the general expressed his hope for the speedy release of the fortress. Field Marshal Schörner allegedly promised to break through the Russian encirclement, even if for this he had to come on foot to Breslau.

But most of the population and ordinary soldiers no longer believed in such promises. It is possible that Niehof himself expressed a similar opinion only in order not to further undermine morale and morale in the fighting German units. In order to start the release, the main units of Army Group Center, at that time located in the Sudetenland, had to completely recapture Upper Silesia from the Red Army. In itself, such an operation in the second half of April 1945 was unlikely.

One way or another, but on April 14, 1945, rumors again spread around Breslau in a possible breakthrough of the Soviet encirclement. Now it is difficult to say who disbanded them. In any case, most priests were very skeptical about them. Konrad Büchsel told the Betanin maintenance staff:

"They must be taken with the utmost caution."

There is information about a similar reaction among Wehrmacht employees and the civilian population. By the end of April, the direness of the situation could not be hidden by any rumors. Gradually, the differences between the center and the outskirts of the city were lost.

By April 20, 1945, the general situation on the fronts was changing almost every day. Reports began to penetrate into Breslau that Soviet troops had reached the Elbe in certain sectors of the front. Lower Silesia was almost completely taken by the Red Army. April 21 Hugo Ertung wrote in

in his diary:

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"This means that the Russians launched a major offensive against Berlin, but at the same time they continue to hold large forces (primarily military aviation) near Breslau. If they manage to take the capital of the Reich, then I think that Breslau will again be subjected to active bombing.

Meanwhile, on April 20, Gauleiter Hanke read a congratulatory telegram from Hitler over the radio. At that time, Hanke, with the exception of Goebbels, was the only Gauleiter who remained "in his place." The appeal read to the people of Breslau was full of illusions about the possibility of a German victory. Hugo Ertung recalled this day:

"In the large hall of the seminary, a holiday dedicated to the birthday of the Führer is taking place. The colonel delivers a solemn speech, in which bombastic promises of an early victory are repeatedly heard. Most officers take such statements very seriously.

skeptically."

Meanwhile, Soviet troops are undertaking a new offensive deep into Breslau.

At this time, hospitals and hospitals begin to take emergency measures to somehow protect the wounded and sick. One of the employees of St. George's Hospital recalled:

"We stretched banners with the Red Cross over the building, and also placed similar banners in the middle of the hall so that they could be seen from the air. Until now, the head nurse had been reluctant to use this sign, as she thought it would be of no use. However, it appears to have had some effect."

At that time, battles for the city were fought in the immediate vicinity of Strigauer Platz, where the Betanina hospital was located in a bunker. In total, there were more than a thousand people in it, including medical personnel. Everyone expected that in the near future the bunker would come under the control of Soviet troops. Therefore, it was a big event for everyone when several new nurses arrived at the hospital on April 22. On that day, one of the sisters wrote in her diary:

"We cautiously counted the hours and were afraid that we would never be able to leave this bunker again. This would mean being taken prisoner. Fortunately for us, in the early morning of April 22, hostilities were briefly suspended. In this small lull we were able to take out some of the wounded. Several other nurses arrived to help us."

The evacuation was carried out in a very timely manner, as fierce fighting began again the next day. The horror that the wounded, the sick and the medical staff were able to avoid can be judged from the memoirs of Gustav Panneck, who worked in the bunker as a fitter in charge of supplying water and electricity:

"This large six-story bunker was completely overcrowded. Not only the rooms, but the corridors and small passageways were filled with the wounded and dying... Observation posts were placed on the St. Paul's Bell Tower adjacent to the hospital building. The enemy was constantly shelling this target... Later in the night, the bell tower was destroyed by an explosion. At that moment, the entire bunker shook. The front was inexorably approaching... Hits of bombs and shells again and again shook the bunker. The bowl of soup kept rolling around on the table. The electric light went out. Three seconds later, emergency lighting came on. For a while, the corridors became light. The diesel-powered dynamo ran all night. We no longer received any power from the power plant located outside. Many of the wards where the wounded lay were lit by a few wax candles. But even they had to be saved, because we did not know if we could in the future

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get more candles. But at one point the hospital was moved. The wounded were distributed to various institutions in the city. Sappers were stationed in the bunker on Strigauer Platz. They were supposed to use jackhammers to break through loopholes in the walls of the bunker. The bunker was supposed to become a defensive object. In case of its surrender to the enemy, several powerful charges were placed inside the building. At that time, there were about 80 more men and 3 women in the bunker. The work of the sappers did not go unnoticed by the Russians. In addition, no flag with the Red Cross was flying over the building that day. On that day, the Russians were able to plant explosives in the ventilation shafts, after which it was blown up. During the explosion, containers with diesel fuel were blown up. Approximately 2 thousand liters of ignited fuel spilled through the corridors, engulfing them completely in flames. From the heat, we were able to hide only in a small airlock room. 85 people in a room of about 4 square meters!

The Russians began to advance. We opened rapid fire. Our soldiers fired machine guns at the exhausted Russians. In addition, in the ruins of the former warehouse of sewing machines, which was also located on Strigauer Platz, our sappers held the defense. But the enemy did not intend to weaken his attack. He certainly wanted to take control of the bunker at Striegauer Platz. He brought down piles of shells and grenades on the walls of the building. Concrete dust and crumbs filled all the corridors and lobbies. From time to time detonated installed inside

bunker by military engineers with explosive charges. The slammed steel door that separated the airlocks from the interior room was bent about 10 centimeters from the monstrous heat. I decided to look behind it for a second, but I saw nothing but raging fire... The young soldiers fired machine guns, boldly defending our lock room. Some of them were killed by shrapnel. Many were seriously wounded in the arms or legs. The paramedics tried to help them immediately. Our stay in the airlock became more and more risky with every minute. We stood and sat on several square meters. Morse code, we conveyed to the tankers a request to release us. But no one came to the rescue. As it turned out, the tanker's radio was damaged. In the tiny lock room we were surrounded on all sides by the Russians.

We repeatedly asked the commander of the sapper group to hand over the bunker so that we could be rescued from a dangerous situation. But every time he refused. He was afraid that this could be regarded as a betrayal, and therefore his relatives would suffer. The then regime threatened anyone who would dare to leave their positions. But nevertheless, as we knew, the commandant of the fortress surrendered Koenigsberg. As a result, one of the desperate sappers decided to act against the will of the commander. He attached a white handkerchief to his carbine and tried to wave it between the bars. But nothing came of this venture. He once again took the handkerchief that had slipped from the barrel of the carbine and, with trembling hands, began to tie it up again. When we pushed him between the bars, he was hit by shrapnel. We had no choice but to sit and wait. In the meantime, the shooting outside had stopped... A miracle had to happen so that we could slip out of the bunker safe and sound. Again there was a powerful explosion. It was detonated by another charge planted in the building. We felt that all our clothes and hair were oiled through. Suddenly, a small bright opening appeared at the locks, which quickly increased. Panic gripped us. We raised our hands and rushed towards the light. Many walked straight along the wounded lying on the ground. They were screaming and asking for help. At that moment, everyone saved only their own lives. Right at the exit, we fell into the hands of the Russians. I squeezed through the opening that was formed in the curved lattice and was able to slip somewhere. For the first time in two weeks, I saw daylight. At the same moment I heard people shouting in German: "Kameraden, come out!" Whether they were really Germans or Russians who spoke German, I do not know. The cry was repeated. With my hands up, I started to run towards these voices. And then I noticed a trench dug on Strigauer Platz. I jumped into it and, without lowering my arms, rushed towards the former warehouse of Singer sewing machines. Constantly stumbling, I still managed to reach the ruins. Then German soldiers met me and showed me the way forward.

After the capture of Strigauer Platz and the bunker located there, Soviet troops were able to penetrate the so-called Nikolaevsky suburb. Now parts of the Red Army are almost

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completely controlled the western part of the city. From that moment, life began to change in the northern regions. On April 26, Karlowitz, a northern suburb largely untouched by the war, experienced the Soviet bombardment. An echo of the previous fierce battles was the summary of the Wehrmacht command of April 26, which stated:

"The brave defenders of Breslau repelled all attacks. In the exemplary military cooperation of Wehrmacht units, Volkssturm units and civilian structures, the fortress has been held since February 17, despite the superiority of the Soviets in technology and manpower.

About the huge losses of the Germans and the significant advance of the Soviet troops from the west to the city center, apparently, it was preferred to remain silent. The summary for April 29 sounded almost the same way:

"The brave defenders of Breslau repulsed all the powerful attacks made from the western direction, inflicting considerable damage to the enemy."

Meanwhile, frightening news was creeping into the city. On April 23, rumors were circulating in Breslau that Hermann Göring had been stripped of all ranks and removed from all posts. However, on April 29, information was published in the serf newspaper that Goering had left the command of the Luftwaffe forces "for health reasons." How confusing the information that came to Breslau was can be judged from the diary entries made by one of the employees of St. George's Hospital:

"Foreign radio stations report that Mussolini and his entire staff were arrested by his own compatriots in the area of Lake Como. Subsequently, information was received that various German ministers left their posts: Frick, Lammers. Rumor has it that the famous radio announcer, Lieutenant Colonel Ditmer, with a white banner, crossed the Elbe and surrendered to the British. The German radio is allegedly captured by the enemy. The operational reports of the High Command of the German Land Forces can hardly be heard only through Prague radio stations. Goebbels is no longer heard on the air. They say that Hitler is dead. Himmler is removed from power. He tried through Count Bernadotte to negotiate with the Americans and the British. He rejected this offer. Our operational reports only provide information that the German units, separated by the Elbe, are rushing towards Berlin in order to push the Russians away from it.

Meanwhile in Breslau the weather was unseasonably hot. Hugo Ertung, to whom we owe many valuable observations about the life of the besieged Breslau, wrote on April 27:

"25th in the shade. In the afternoon I climb the tower where an observation post is set up. Through periscopic binoculars, I can look at the territory beyond the Vaida River, which is occupied by the enemy. I see abandoned Russian planes, around which tiny figures move: the enemy! The area between our positions is blooming and looks quite peaceful. I cast an agonizing glance to the south, where I can see burnt-out houses and ruined towers. I recognize the water tower on Cherry Alley and the belfry of St. John's Church right next to it. Between these buildings, our apartment was once located, in which we were very happy. Yesterday the Colonel showed me photographs of Hohenzollern Strasse taken during aerial photography. I saw the ruins of our house on them."

The siege of Breslau went "by leaps and bounds" to its end, but in the fortress itself they continued to pass death sentences on "deserters". Hugo Hartung described in his book an incident that happened on April 25, 1945:

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"A deserter was brought to our command post. He was a craftsman from Breslau, a father of several children, who was trying to evade the city's long-lost senseless defense in order to help his family survive. The man looked decent and behaved appropriately. When the colonel began to ask about the reasons for his act, he did not answer. He knew that fate had already pronounced its verdict. The interrogation turned into a formal mockery when a young lieutenant stepped in. He began to vilify the man with the dirtiest words, declaring that it's not even a pity to waste a bullet ... In the evening of the same day, the same lieutenant again arrived at the command post to clarify whether the sentence had been carried out.

It is amazing that the lives of many Germans, who did not see the point in continuing the war, ended just a few days before the surrender of Germany!

The day of April 30, 1945 was marked in the history of World War II by several events. It was then that the battles for Breslau and Berlin reached their climax. It was on this day that Soviet troops reached the Reich Chancellery, which throughout the battle for the German capital was the command post from where Hitler gave his orders. Not wanting to surrender to the Soviet troops, he shot himself at about 3 p.m. In his political testament

Hitler made Grand Admiral Dönitz his successor. | May, an official announcement was made from the Führer's headquarters:

"This afternoon, the Führer Adolf Hitler died, who fought against Bolshevism to the last breath in the name of Germany."

This message was doubly false. First, the wrong date of death was indicated. Secondly, not a word was said about Hitler's suicide. This message on May 1, 1945 instantly spread throughout Breslau. This was a clear sign of the collapse of the Third Reich, which could be expected any day. In Breslau itself, Hitler's death was announced twice. In huge letters in the 118th issue of the Silesian Daily Newspaper (front-line supplement) dated May 2, 1945, the Führer's "heroic death" was reported. At the same time, the order of General Niehoff was distributed in parts. It stated in particular:

"Defenders of the fortress of Breslau! The Führer died heroically in the fateful struggle of the German people. On April 30, the Führer transferred command to his successor, Grand Admiral Dönitz."

This appeal in the form of yellow posters was hung on all the streets of the city. How was the news of Hitler's death received in the besieged "fortress"? There were only two references to this account in the documents. Konrad Buechsel wrote:

"This death will have huge political and military implications." On the contrary, Alfons Buchholz expressed a highly skeptical opinion:

"The report of this type of death raises huge doubts. He probably died of a cerebral hemorrhage or something like that."

And then he talks about the succession of Dönitz:

"This appointment is extremely absurd. The transfer of political and military power to him is most likely the result of forced circumstances."

Compared to the voices from Breslau, where they did not know about Hitler's suicide, there were also very authoritative opinions. The war diary of the Wehrmacht command contains an entry regarding the former Chief of the General Staff of the Luftwaffe, General Kohler, who until April 22 was in direct contact with Hitler. So, Kohler told the general

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Christian, who was responsible for communication in the Führer's apparatus:

"Hitler dragged us into great trouble, and now he has left all of us, the whole people, to their fate."

Kohler himself wrote in his diaries:

"When he (Hitler) was informed that Director Leune and his wife blew themselves up, as well as the Mayor of Leipzig and his entire family committed suicide (in both cases under the conditions of approaching enemy troops), he angrily objected: "Never! This is a cowardly desire to avoid responsibility! I never want to hear about such things again!" Now he has done the same."

For several days the inhabitants of Breslau had no obstacles to listening to foreign radio stations (German radio stopped broadcasting completely). | May 1945 Hugo Ertung wrote:

"Now all the conversations revolve only around one thing: how are we going to live on after THIS? In the basement of the opera house there was a room for guard duty, where it was not considered shameful to listen to the German-language service of the BBC. This is the only way to know the true news. The fighting for Berlin has actually already stopped, the Americans have taken Munich and Garmisch. What will happen to us?"

The death of Hitler did not actually change anything either during the battles for Breslau or the living conditions of the civilian population. The only thing that happened in this regard was the complete disorientation of party functionaries. Confidence began to leave them.

After the Red Army units managed to achieve considerable success in Breslau in the second half of April 1945, the Soviet command chose to change tactics. Instead of artillery fire, it was decided to use political propaganda. Calls sounded from the loudspeakers, heard over all sectors of the front. The situation on the fronts was regularly reported, which should have led the defenders of the fortress to think about the senselessness of continuing the struggle. Under these conditions, General Niehof could rely on himself and his staff. On the one hand, ammunition was coming to an end. But, on the other hand, the Soviet troops failed to break through to the city center. However, in Breslau they already knew that the capital of the Reich, Berlin, had fallen, and therefore, in the near future, Soviet troops could receive significant reinforcements. Meanwhile, from the Soviet speakers, agitators reported not only about the death of Hitler, but also that Breslau had fulfilled the task assigned to him, and therefore his defenders were free from any oaths and obligations. But it was not worth believing that the Soviet command counted only on the power of propaganda suggestion. In the conditions of multiple superiority in military equipment and manpower, it did not exclude the possibility of another assault on the city. General Niehoff was well aware of this. His considerations were reinforced by the proposal of Major Hameister, the commander of one of the sapper units. He proposed to deliver a powerful blow to the Soviet positions on the segment between the Oder and the village of Pöpelwitz. The major himself believed that this was the only way out of the current situation.

So, the question arose about a breakthrough from the surrounded city. Despite the fact that General Niehof considered the success of this operation unlikely, he secretly ordered Major Otto and Colonel Tizler to develop a plan to break through the Soviet encirclement from inside the city. After several days of work, the officers reported to the commandant of the fortress that breaking through the encirclement was a senseless, irresponsible and impossible undertaking. This offensive would be drowned in blood. Despite the secrecy of these developments, various rumors began to spread among the population. An unforeseen outflow of the population to the south-west of the city began. Even if General Niehof decided to break through, there simply would not have been a place for military units in these areas - they were all densely packed with civilians. Under these conditions, General Niehof began to lean towards the decision to

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possible surrender. After the war, he, as if justifying himself, said that this decision was dictated not by his weakness or indecision, but by concern for the fate of the people entrusted to him. But even this decision had to be made in complete secrecy, otherwise the city risked plunging into chaos. An important task was to impose on the Soviet command the conditions for the honorable surrender of the city. To begin with, the order was distributed in parts:

"I continue to be your commander! In this difficult hour, I urge you to trust me as yourself! You must know that I will choose the path that is best for you."

During these critical hours, General Niehof contacted Schörner, who by that time had already become a field marshal. He reminded him that two months ago he had promised to "strive a helping hand" and break the blockade of the city. Niehof reported on the fulfillment of the order given to him, after which he announced his intention to capitulate. Schörner's first reaction was very strange. He promised to unblock the city! He called on Niehof to fight for every house to the last

cartridge. At the same time, the field marshal expected from General Niehoff that he would maintain an oath of allegiance to the already dead Führer.

Meanwhile, in the operational reports of the Wehrmacht High Command of May 1, 1945 was:

"The heroic defenders of Breslau again repulsed all the attacks of the Bolsheviks."

Now the population lived in constant tension and horror from what awaited them in the future. However, at least some consolation was the fact that the meager supply of food continued. Their distribution continued to be carried out, including through grocery stores. But in order to get these products, it was necessary to go through an unsafe path, and then stand in a long line, which, in the conditions of constant shelling and bombing, was also an unsafe occupation. The normalization of the situation in this direction did not at all contribute to the fact that both people responsible for supplying the civilian population with food (Blenn and Lopoch) were killed by fragments from exploding bombs. The city froze in agonizing expectation.

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Chapter 9

The last days of the siege of Breslau were marked by intensified bombing of the city. Soviet planes made air raids already in the middle of broad daylight. It was the aviation that was freed up after the fall of Berlin. According to Ernst Hornig, in the first days of May 1945 alone, at least a thousand civilians died in the city.

In this situation, which seemed hopeless to everyone, the words written by one of the residents in his diary became a common motto:

"Since no one else can help us, everyone began to cry out to the Almighty."

The fact remains that these days many soldiers began to visit churches, no matter whether they were Catholic or evangelical. In this regard, the entry made by Hugo Hartung is quite remarkable:

"Now the lieutenant from the company headquarters, who unpleasantly distinguished himself during the interrogation of an elderly deserter, closed the seminary chapel, where the soldiers began to pray. In front of the doors to it, he erected a barricade of benches. To all reproaches, he cynically declared: "He who needs to pray can just as well do it in the closet."

On 3 May, the city center came under the heaviest shelling of the entire siege. In these tragic days, a lot of children died. They are attracted by the sunny weather, almost all over the city left the cellars.

Looking back, it should be noted that on April 2, the city of Glogau capitulated, which was considered in Silesia, except for Breslau, the only fortress that continued to resist the Soviet troops. By the first days of May, Breslau had become the only major city in Germany that had not yet surrendered to the allied forces. It was the last "fortress" of the already essentially disappeared Reich. Under these conditions, Wehrmacht soldiers and mine dwellers have long been asking themselves: did it make sense to continue the senseless defense of the city, each day of which brought more and more new victims?

In the first days of May 1945, representatives of two German Christian denominations, Catholics and Evangelicals, decided to have their say. The risk of possible negotiations between the clergy and the commandant of the fortress was that the order of the Wehrmacht High Command was still in force, according to which any persons

those who persuaded the commandants to surrender the fortresses to the "enemy" should have been immediately shot. This order was as follows:

"The High Command of the Wehrmacht proclaims: cities are the most important transport hubs. For this reason, they must be held to the very end, not taking into account either the promises or the threats that come from both the enemy's truce and through the enemy's loudspeakers. The commandants appointed in each city are personally responsible for the execution of this order. If some civilians or officials try to prevent the fulfillment of their military duty, as well as the commandants themselves refuse to fulfill this duty, then they are sentenced to death. The cases when it is possible to stop the defense of cities are established exclusively by the High Command of the Wehrmacht.

Chief of the High Command of the Wehrmacht Keitel

Reichsfuehrer SS Himmler

Head of the Party Chancellery Bormann.

Given this order, the priests of Breslau could not be denied a certain amount of courage. The meeting with General Niehof was scheduled for 11 o'clock on May 4th. How

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Ernst Hornig, who was a member of this delegation, recalled: "None of us could sleep the night before."

The priests set off ahead of time, at 10 o'clock, but came under fire. Further they could not move. It was decided to meet again at 12 o'clock. At about 1 pm, a special car arrived for the clergy, which the general sent. Only after that, the church delegation managed to get into the building of the State and University Library on Peschany Island, where the headquarters of the commandant of the fortress was located in one of the basements. The meeting was attended by the military - General Niehof himself, his adjutant Lieutenant Colonel Tiesler and Major Otto, from the Catholics - Bishop Ferhe and Rector Kramer, from the evangelists - Ernst Hornig and Dean Konrad. The floor was given to Ernst Hornig. He began to paint the horrors of battles that were already meaningless. Separately, he emphasized the plight of civilians, among whom daily losses amounted to at least a hundred people. Hornig ended his speech with a question addressed to General Niehof:

"Under these conditions, in the face of the Almighty, can you take responsibility for continuing the defense of the city?"

There was a deep silence in the basement. General Niehof, according to eyewitnesses, was silent for about a minute, and then said:

"Your worries are my worries. Can you tell me what I need to do?"

In the subsequent conversation, the priests, discarding all fears, expressed the opinion that the only way out of this situation was to surrender Breslau to the Soviet troops. To this, General Niehof objected:

"I am subordinate to Field Marshal Schörner. He orders us to organize a breakthrough. Under these conditions, we will have to gather the entire civilian population in the city center."

Ernst Hornig, who was a lieutenant during the First World War, began to protest:

"With such a balance of forces, a breakthrough of the encirclement line will end in a bloody massacre. If the Wehrmacht cannot escape, then there is no need to talk about the civilian population. Women with

children are not capable of a long transition."

After thinking, the general remarked: "SS units will never surrender." "Then let them go into the breach at their own peril," retorted Hornig. The conversation actually ended in nothing. No specific decision has been made. But General Niehof promised the priests to announce it in the near future.

The second meeting took place on the same day in the late afternoon. At the same time, only Ernst Hornig was invited to it. He was supposed to give the Breslau officers a certificate of the state of the civilian population. When he arrived at the basement, he found that about 25 officers (including SS men) had gathered there. General Niehof asked Hornig: "Tell the gentlemen of the officers what you told me this afternoon." Hornig, in his own words, was stunned - talking to the SS in the surrender of the city was a huge risk. He could only squeeze out of himself: "Mr. General! Can I be as frank now as before? The general replied: "Moreover, I would ask you to be equally frank." The evangelical priest repeated everything he had said a few hours ago. The general shook his hand: "Thank you, I didn't want more from you." Further, the council of war continued without the presence of Hornig. Apparently, General Niehof wanted to convince all the officers to make a single decision that would suit absolutely everyone. As a result, at 5 p.m., two German truces were sent to the corner of SA (Emperor Friedrich Wilhelm) Street and

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Victoria. Two officers with a white flag were supposed to give the Red Army units a signal to start negotiations. In one of his books, the German researcher G. Knopp noted:

"Soviet troops did not shell the city for several days, giving the encircled ones the last chance for voluntary surrender. However, the defenders did not take advantage of the opportunity to save many human lives. Only at the beginning of May did the German parliamentarians raise the white flag.

Among them was Arthur Grossman. Teenagers from the Hitler Youth tried to stop them:

"We were clearly visible to everyone with our white flag. We went to the other side to negotiate. We had to go past the positions of the Hitler Youth. For them, our act was completely unacceptable. They didn't want to give up. They shouted to us that they would fight on and never capitulate. Of course, we had an unpleasant sense of danger, but they could not do anything to us. We had an order. They just got in our way and wouldn't let us go any further. We called their battalion commander. Then they contacted the command by phone. The general talked to the commander. Only then, under the screams and abuse of the Nazi Youth, we were able to continue our journey. On the way back, we again encountered manifestations of discontent. They called us traitors and cowards. They again shouted that they would fight on. Among these cries, one tenor stood out in particular.

At this point, Gauleiter Hanke intervened, who continued to adhere to the slogan: "We will never capitulate!" . That same evening, he appeared at General Niehoff's and began to present all kinds of accusations against him. The next morning, May 5, the serf newspaper came out with an appeal not to succumb to defeatism. However, there were no specific allegations in it.

As is known from the memoirs of General Niehoff, on the night of May 4-5, he had a difficult conversation with Hanke. Gauleiter, who by that time had already become the Reichsfuehrer of the SS, rejected the proposal of the military to commit suicide. He also turned down an offer to obtain forged documents in the name of Private Mayer, which could allow him to get lost in a crowd of soldiers. As a result, the Gauleiter chose to leave the city on the Fieseler-Storch (Stork) aircraft at his disposal. The fact that the Gauleiter left Breslau in secret, without informing his entourage, is evidenced by two facts. First, on the morning of May 6, from the bunker where Hanke's headquarters were located, more than once, by telephone, General Niehoff was interested in his whereabouts. Secondly, in the same

On the same day, an officer arrived at the headquarters of the commandant of the fortress, who was supposed to clarify the same information about Khanka.

To understand Hanke's behavior, one must turn to the events of the last days of April 1945. Hanke was still "leading" the defense of Breslau when Hitler learned of Heinrich Himmler's negotiations with the Allies. Accusing Himmler of high treason, Hitler in his will April 29, 1945 named his successor as Reichsführer SS and chief of the German police Karl Hanke. The Russian researcher K. Zalessky noted that, theoretically, Hanke also had to receive, as the head of the SS, the rank of Reichsleiter, but no special order was given for this. Such a decision was only an emotional impulse: Hitler chose the most energetic party leader of the NSDAP as the head of the SS, who did not lose the will to resist and showed himself to be a decisive and cruel politician, ready to defend Germany to the last drop of blood of his subordinates. Despite the fact that there were constant reports that the hierarchs of the Third Reich were trying to escape, Hanke's actions were for the Führer "a ray of light in the dark kingdom." In principle, Hitler's decision meant nothing: firstly, he no longer had the opportunity to ensure the transfer of powers from Himmler to Hanke; and Himmler had in Germany significant SS and police forces personally subordinate to him, the SS apparatus remained loyal to him - as far as it was possible in the conditions of impending chaos. Second, Hanke

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was completely occupied with organizing the defense of Breslau and simply physically could not take up his duties, let alone organize at least some kind of management of the huge "SS empire". Thirdly, Hanke (despite his high SS rank) did not have any positions and support in the SS, he was not an SS functionary, but a party functionary, and relations between the party and the SS became more tense every year. The higher hierarchs of the SS did not seriously consider his candidacy, especially since in the event of Himmler's resignation, the SS had its own candidates.

Having flown from Breslau, Hanke arrived at the headquarters of the commander of Army Group Center, General Field Marshal Ferdinand Schörner, and from there went to Prague, where it was planned to organize a desperate resistance to the advancing Soviet troops. However, it turned out that he had absolutely nothing to do in Prague. Then Hanke decided to make his way to Flensburg, where the new German government was located and the headquarters of Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz, whom Hitler appointed as his successor. This decision was due to the fact that Hanke, in accordance with Hitler's will, was still officially the highest state official - the chief of the German police, and his stay with the government was quite justified and gave some hope for the future. (Hanke, like many other members of the government, expected the Western Allies to recognize the Dönitz government and leave him in charge of Germany.) Hanke's first setback was at the airfield, where his guards encountered Czech partisans and were forced to retreat. The fastest way to get to the north of Germany was cut off. Hanke decided to fight his way through Carlsbad. He formed a small battle group from the remnants of the 18th SS Volunteer Motorized Division "Horst Wessel" and left Prague. However, his small group was surrounded by Czech partisans at Neudorf, near Komotau (the Czech name is Nova Ves), in the Pilsen region, and on May 6, 1945, surrendered. Hanke was also captured - he was in an SS field uniform without insignia, in addition, he did not have documents that would indicate his high position. If the partisans knew that the Reichsführer SS himself fell into their hands, perhaps Hanke would have been able to save his life, and it is quite possible that after the war he would not have been sentenced to death (although, of course, there was no guarantee of this). But Hanke remained incognito, and then, on May 8, 1945, he made an attempt to escape. This attempt failed and Hanke was shot dead by the partisans.

And if Hanke was only saving his life, then the actual creator of the Volkssturm in Breslau, SA Obergruppenführer Herzog, chose a completely different path. He chose to voluntarily leave

life. Herzog himself believed that Breslau should have kept fighting. Such an opinion was based not so much on National Socialist fanaticism as on the opinion that in the near future the Western powers were to start a war against the USSR. According to the plans of a high-ranking attack aircraft, in this struggle between the "West" and "East", Breslau was to play, if not a key, then at least a very important role.

If we talk about the specific results of the negotiations that were achieved on May 4, it could be noted that at 16 hours 50 minutes (that is, before the extended officers' meeting at Niehoff), the German units ceased any fire. Shortly thereafter, the fire was also ceased by units of the Red Army. Rumors began to spread around the city that negotiations had begun with the Soviet command. Many hoped that their suffering would be ended. May 5, 1945, which fell on a Saturday, was a day of intense uncertainty for the people of Breslau. But by noon, Soviet aviation and artillery again began shelling the city. It was announced from the Soviet loudspeakers that General Niehoff had renounced the terms of an honorable surrender. Perhaps this was due to the fact that Hanke's actions disrupted the truce scheduled for May 4. In any case, on May 5, Breslau's serf newspaper came out under the heading "Resistance to the Soviets Continues". It not only talked about the truce in Holland and Denmark, but also cited the words that "the fortress of Breslau rejected the offer of surrender by the Soviets."

In the second half of May 5, General Niehof himself gathered again all the commanders to announce his decision to surrender the city. He said:

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"I have invited you to announce my final decision. What was done by you, your soldiers and the civilian population does not require a separate description. History itself will someday pass its verdict. Hitler is dead, Berlin has fallen. Allied troops from the west and from the east penetrated into the very heart of Germany. There are no more prerequisites for continuing the fight for Breslau. Each subsequent victim is a crime. I have the resolute intention of stopping the fighting and surrendering the city to the enemy on honorable terms. The last cartridge has been fired, and we, as required by law, have fulfilled our military duty".

General Ruff, who had the longest service record of all the officers present, expressed his agreement on behalf of the commanders of the fortress and thanked General Niehoff. After that, the command of the 17th army was notified by radiogram about the upcoming surrender of the fortress.

On May 5, 1945, General Niehof gathered for the last time the commanders of all units of the garrison in order to read them a telegram that came from the command of the 17th Army. It was not without a certain mournful pathos, but in any case it said:

"Germany mournfully bows her banners in the face of the courage and steadfastness shown by the soldiers and inhabitants of Breslau."

The decision to surrender was reported to the Soviet command on the evening of March 5. Hugo Ertung recalled:

"In the evening, over the city, Russian loudspeakers sounded messages about the upcoming surrender. They were interspersed with music. That night, many rockets and bursts of tracer cartridges flew up over the Russian positions - it was a firework of the winners.

On the morning of May 6, around 8 o'clock, two German officers on the "southern" front with a white flag headed for the Soviet positions. They announced that the commandant of the fortress agreed with the cessation of the struggle if the surrender took place on honorable terms. But in fairness, let's say that Niehoff had no trump cards and could not actually determine the terms of surrender

cities. One of the parliamentarians, Oberleutnant Grossman, in the evening of the same day told the consistory adviser Buchsel that "the Russians received him and the accompanying interpreter very well and even fed him in a friendly way." The conditions for the surrender of the city turned out to be very favorable for the Germans. But on the way back, an unpleasant incident happened. German parliamentarians stepped on a German mine. The interpreter was badly wounded, but Lieutenant Grossman escaped with only minor scratches.

May 6, 1945 in Breslau was an unusually sunny Sunday afternoon. The people on the streets, delighted for the first time in months by the silence of the cannonade, were dressed in the best costumes that could be found in their meager wardrobe. On this day, Ernst Hornig was again summoned to General Niehof. The general met with the priest. There was a certain fussiness in his actions. Niehof himself explained it:

"Your request has been granted. I surrender the city and immediately go to the Russians. See to it that the population in the city maintains iron discipline."

After that, the general said goodbye. Hornig himself was quite surprised when he met two Soviet officers in the headquarters corridor, who, apparently, were waiting for Niehoff. When they saw Hornig and the robed Catholic vicar Ferhe accompanying him, they straightened up. Ferhe blessed them with the sign of the cross, the Soviet officers bowed their heads in response.

On May 6, the commandant of the fortress sent two parliamentary officers who were supposed to provide communication with the Soviet command. Only then did General Niehoff set off,

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to start personal negotiations with General Gluzdovsky. During them, certain conditions for the surrender of Breslau were worked out, which were formalized by the command of the 6th Soviet Army in a separate document:

"To Mr. Commandant of the Breslau Fortress,

General of the Infantry Niehof.

In accordance with your agreement regarding the honorable surrender of your encircled fortress and its garrison, I offer you the following terms:

1. All troops under your command cease any combat operations on May 6, 1945 from 14:00 Moscow time (from 13:00 German time).
2. You hand over all personnel, weapons, military equipment, vehicles, engineering structures intact.
3. We guarantee you, all your officers and soldiers who have ceased resistance, life, food, the safety of personal property and awards, and after the end of the war - return to their homeland. All officers are allowed to carry edged weapons.
4. All the wounded and sick will be provided with immediate medical assistance at our expense.
5. All civilians are guaranteed security and normal living conditions.
6. Personal vehicles and maintenance are reserved for you personally and other generals, as well as the corresponding maintenance of generals in captivity.

Commander of the 6th Russian 25th Army

1st Ukrainian Front General Gluzdovsky Chief of Staff Major General Panov

May 6, 1945"

General Niehof, among other things, was very pleased with the fact that in the conditions presented to him there were no special references to the formations

Waffen-SS.

"To the conditions for the surrender of the fortress, I also added guarantees for all soldiers and officers, including the Waffen-SS, who took part in its defense."

However, these guarantees were only written. So, for example, the commander of the 609th division, Ruff, who at one time was the commandant of Riga, was hanged. Most of the defenders of Breslau spent at least ten years in Soviet camps. In German literature, much has been written and is being written to this day about the arbitrariness perpetrated by the Red Army after the occupation of Breslau. But at the same time, one cannot discount the words of General Niehoff that General Gluzdovsky always behaved with the utmost correctness. Lieutenant Hartman, who was repeatedly mentioned by us, recalled the surrender of the fortress.

"May 6, the day Breslau surrendered, we again met with my crew on Janstrasse. We were on our way to Berlinskaya Street to my platoon's command post when the ceasefire order was announced. It was possible to shoot if only the Russians continued their attacks. However, everything was very calm. In the afternoon, in accordance with the order, we left our positions and for the last time rode in tanks through the streets of Breslau. It was Sunday. It was an amazingly good spring day. But we weren't happy. No more shots were fired, and the civilian population poured into the streets. Some elderly woman shouted to us: "Unfortunate soldiers! Now you will be taken prisoner! In the courtyard of the judicial prison, our commander formed a company and announced surrender. Many had tears in their eyes. In the evening of the same day, the engines of our cars failed. We did not have time to drive even a block, when the pistons stuck in the motors due to overheating. According to the terms of surrender, we could not destroy equipment. The Russians entered the city at night. Already in

25 So it appears from all German documents.

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Monday, May 7, 1945, our company marched along Frankfurt Street past the Joseph Stalin tank, which we had hit in the past. Ahead of us was darkness and many years of captivity, from which not everyone returned to their homeland.

During the negotiations on the conditions for the surrender of Breslau, a demand was put forward that Soviet troops would enter Breslau on May 6, 1945 at 21:00. General Niehof tried to argue that it was too close a time to have time to circulate his order on the terms of surrender in parts. The general wanted to head back to Breslau with the signed terms of surrender, but this aroused objections from the army commissar. He demanded that all preparations for the surrender be carried out by telephone directly from the villa. As a result, it was decided that the text of the conditions signed by the parties would be delivered to Breslau by Major Otto. The further fate of General Niehof was in many respects dramatic. At first, on a convenient occasion, he was sent to the "political camp" in Krasnogorsk. As a result, despite the "respectable terms of surrender", the general spent more than 10 years in Soviet camps. After his return to Germany, he repeatedly expressed the opinion that he "mistakenly believed General Gluzdovsky," since the terms of surrender were already violated in 1946.

If we talk about the entry of Soviet troops into Breslau, then at 21:00 on May 6, 1945, this was not a mass phenomenon. At first, only Soviet officers began to appear on the streets, in particular, in the Nikolaevsky suburb. Actually, the troops entered the city already closer to midnight. First

According to eyewitnesses, the Red Army officers who appeared on the streets of Breslau behaved cautiously and even politely. There is no doubt that they were trying to establish contact with the local population. In fact, the concern was justified. The local population, fearing hunger, began to take away food. In addition, the commandant's office of the fortress decided to destroy all stocks of alcoholic products in order to protect the inhabitants from the notorious "drunken violence of the Russians." Wine, beer and schnapps were poured directly into the sewers, which turned into rivers of wine.

At first, the city was quite quiet. Hornig recalled that at about one in the morning a roar of voices and the clatter of many boots began to be heard. Parts of the Red Army entered the city from various directions. They were supposed to meet somewhere near the Ring. After this moment, the city was filled with "Russian jubilation", which to many Germans was reminiscent of the New Year holidays that took place in Breslau before the war.

In post-war West Germany, many books were published that depicted excesses in the territories occupied by Soviet troops. In Günter Baedeker's book "Woe to the Vanquished" there is a passage that is dedicated to Breslau: "Three weeks after the fall of the fortress of Breslau, the ruins continued to smoke. Here and there the wind fanned the smoldering coals into flames. The smell of desolation and death hung over the city. During the siege, 40,000 civilians were killed. Many were not buried, many lay in the cellars of collapsed houses. Barely visible paths led through the ruins and debris. Most of the streets were impossible to walk, and often impossible to recognize. In this desert, at the end of May 1945, Breslau resident real estate dealer B.F. looking for his home. He told:

"My son's house was razed to the ground. Eight of the houses I owned suffered the same fate. On the corners of the streets, Russian soldiers sat on chairs. Here and there, having fun, they fired machine guns along the streets. Our apartment and my homeland, everything, everything was erased forever and without a trace.

Many houses that were not damaged by the war were moved in by Russian soldiers and officers. In the ruins of Breslau, in cellars and ruins, thousands of women, children and the elderly settled. Most of them walked around in rags and slept somewhere on torn mattresses. They spent their days searching for food. Famine reigned in Breslau. The Germans - women, children, old men - searched the ruins, turned over the stones in the destroyed apartments, put the beams aside, climbed into the cellars. They were looking for canned food, spoiled, moldy bread, but often after a long hard work, freeing the entrance to the next room, they stumbled upon corpses. Starving Germans immediately after the surrender

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the Russians were sent to so-called corrective labor. Many women, men and older children spent many hours a day clearing debris from the streets with their own hands. Among them were many who had been forced to clear the runway for Gauleiter Karl Hanke two months earlier. A resident of Breslau V.F. reported:

"These women, dressed in rags, no longer looked like women. They were absolutely not cared for. Despite this, they were constantly exposed to the arbitrariness of the soldiers.

The war ended, but the violence continued. A resident of Breslau, a railway employee, Adolf Walda, heard how shots rattled over Benderplatz at night:

"Russian soldiers hunted women." And real estate broker B.F. reported:

"As soon as it got dark, the cries of women for help were heard in the darkness, and horror reigned everywhere. The mother could not protect her daughter and vice versa. However, there were also women who voluntarily received Soviet officers, cooked food for them, washed them and sheathed them. For this they received food."

In the public hospital of Breslau, on the orders of the Soviet commandant's office, a station was equipped for women with venereal diseases. Real estate agent B.F.:

"There was a queue in front of the hospital, worthy of pity."

Often the Germans who remained in Breslau were sent by the Russians to various jobs that were carried out with particular bitterness: they had to pull out the remnants of what the war had left them in basements and apartments, put them along the edges of the streets, and then load them into Soviet cars. Witness V.S. wrote:

"Russians kept coming and demanding items to take out, such as pianos, sewing machines, wardrobes, bedroom sets, bicycles, typewriters."

Heavily loaded, Soviet trucks were moving towards the station. There, the booty was reloaded into wagons and sent to Russia. In Breslau, as in all of East Germany, the Russians pursued with the utmost thoroughness the goal of taking everything of any value to themselves, as far as possible, before they handed power over to Poland.

On July 1, 1945, a Polish civil commissar became the head of the city administration. The everyday life of the Germans in the Silesian capital became unbearable. A resident of Breslau H., whom the Russians appointed district burgomaster after the occupation, reported:

"To the abuses of the Russian occupation authorities was now added the arbitrariness of the armed Polish thugs of completely different motives, completely understandable to us, anti-fascists, if they did not affect us ourselves ... Nevertheless, here, too, the positive forces of the Russian military administration manifested themselves, the Russian military commandant's office often responded to requests and provided protection and protection from the violence of the Poles".

Polish gangs, according to the upholsterer Georg Fritsch from Breslau, broke into the crypts of the city cemetery and threw out the coffins. Then they were comfortably housed in the crypts for residence. From the crypts they made robbery sorties, and hid their prey in the cemetery walls. One German pastor was robbed during a funeral, the bandits at the grave took off his shoes.

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"At first," district burgomaster H. reported, describing the relationship between Poles and Soviet soldiers, "when the Russians became aware that Breslau and Silesia were becoming Polish, they set fire to entire residential areas in a rage because they laid down their lives for the conquest of this land and this city, and now the fruits of their victory are contested by a gang of marauders, posing as such winners as they have never been before. Even a few weeks later, when relations calmed down, here and there you could see houses burning, set on fire by the Russians.

The armed Polish militia was the vanguard of the Polish civilian population, which now, a few weeks after the assumption of civil power by the new masters, rushed to Breslau. The Germans had to give way to them, leave apartments, rent out enterprises. Real estate agent B.F. and his wife were expelled from the apartment, which with great difficulty they again somehow managed to settle in. A soldier and a civilian came to them: "The soldier pointed a machine gun at my chest and said: "The same thing that the Germans did in Poland. I'll give you seven minutes, now six, now five!..." The merchant complained to the Polish burgomaster. The burgomaster replied: "There is no more property for the Germans!"

The dispossessed and disenfranchised inhabitants of Breslau were impoverished day by day. There was no food or medicine. The Poles approved the grain ration for the Germans at two pounds for ten days. And even this number was often not issued. The Germans in Breslau were starving. There were mountains of bread and meat in the Polish shops in Breslau, but you had to pay for them in Polish money, and

The Germans were forced to work generally for free. In pharmacies that came over to the Poles, the cost of one aspirin tablet was ten to fifteen marks.

Above many basements where the Germans lived, and in the windows of many houses where the Germans still lived, in the summer of 1945, pieces of yellow cloth hung - signals of an epidemic. They forbade entering the basement or the house. Typhus broke out and raged everywhere. The disease claimed countless weakened and starving Germans.

Real estate agent B.F.:

"Babies almost without exception were sentenced to death. Mothers could not calm the children, since there was no food for them themselves. In addition, there was no water for washing, no linen and no care, since most of the women had to do corrective work. Wrapped in rags, of course, without a coffin, such an innocent creature was buried in a cemetery without any formalities.

The need grew, and often starving, emaciated, dressed in rags, German women, men and children, with a bowl in hand, went to those parts of the city where Russian field kitchens stood. The sight of the vanquished aroused pity among the victors. Real estate agent B.F. with thanks recalled:

"Sometimes the cooks gave a ladle of porridge and broth, and whoever was lucky received a bone with something on it and bread. I also came many times with my kettle. "Come on, old man, come over," they called me and poured a full vessel. It was a lifesaver for us."

Given this information, it is not surprising that Silesia in general and the vicinity of Breslau in particular were one of the hotbeds of post-war tension. A few days after the war had already ended, Polish troops arrived in the city, including forty policemen who were supposed to maintain order in the ruined fortress. One of them later recalled:

"At first, one of our tasks was to clear the territory of the remnants of the Nazi troops. To fulfill it, we organized ambushes on the roads at night. Every night we brought several SS men, Gestapo employees and bandits to the police station.

This Polish policeman somewhat embellished the situation. Most of this work was carried out by Soviet troops. The Poles, as a rule, did not go far from the police

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sites, naively believing that partisan attacks and German resistance would end somehow by themselves. Until mid-summer, Breslau had virtually no direct contact with Warsaw. The reason for this was the constant breaks in telegraph and telephone cables, which were carried out by German partisans - "werewolves". In addition, the Polish detachments and the city administration experienced a clear lack of qualified personnel. It is for this reason that they depended on the Germans, who were led by the German Communists and members of Antifa (Anti-Fascist Action). But even the efforts of the German communists in suppressing the resistance of the "werewolves" did not find wide support among the local population.

It seemed that the Poles were generally incapable of any productive activity. Marshal Rokossovsky had to intervene in the matter. On his initiative, an NKVD brigade was sent to the city, which was supposed to surround and then comb the city. Anyone caught with a weapon in his hands or suspected of complicity with the "werewolves" was shot on the spot. Such methods of dealing with Nazi resistance immediately prompted the Polish authorities to many abuses. According to official statistics, the Polish policemen issued thirty to forty charges against "arsonists" a day. It might seem that there really was an extensive network of "werewolves" in Breslau. But there is also a simpler

explanation - the Poles tried to take possession of someone else's property, and then, under any pretext, got rid of its owners. In fact, they themselves provoked arson in order to continue to carry out repressions among the Germans. As a result, even a month after the end of the war, the city was engulfed in fires.

But this did not mean that there were no real sorties of "werewolves" in the city. On the eve of the fall of the city, teams of "werewolves" roamed the city, poisoning alcohol and food, believing that they would go to the soldiers of the Red Army. The assistant burgomaster actively participated in the preparation of partisan attacks. On his initiative, underground passages were equipped, which had armored doors leading to the dungeons from the basements of dilapidated houses. At least a few sorties have been made from the depths of such dungeons. During one of them, two Soviet officers were killed. In another case, a Polish policeman was able to escape by throwing a grenade into the dungeon in time. During the third sortie, a gunfight ensued. The German partisans were eliminated, but during the battle twelve Polish policemen were killed and wounded.

In the middle of the summer of 1945, the Polish authorities nevertheless decided to restore order in Breslau and its environs. The reason for this was a new wave of attacks by "werewolves", which, as it seemed to the Soviet leadership, had already been destroyed. On July 17, a Polish soldier was shot and killed while patrolling the streets of the city. A month later, four Red Army soldiers were ambushed on the streets of Breslau. At about the same time, a German partisan detachment attacked a Polish police post. The Poles were saved from imminent death by the Red Army soldiers who came to the rescue in time. In the suburbs of Breslau, the "werewolves" managed to achieve their goal - they destroyed the police station. Then the attackers retreated to a local village, where they burned several houses of Polish colonists. Before disappearing into the forest, they made another attack. This time the target was a small detachment of the Red Army.

Another "hot spot" in Silesia was the remote town of Jöls. This case was a classic illustration of the attacks on the Poles that began to occur after the surrender of Germany. This was caused by the mass return of German refugees to their small homeland. The town of Öls was seriously destroyed during the Soviet offensive. Almost three-quarters of the inhabitants left it, preferring to evacuate in time to central Germany. As a result, by May 1945, its population was only 18 thousand people. However, in June 1945, its population began to grow again. Naturally, "werewolves", military partisans, fanatical Nazis disguised themselves among them. After waiting for time, they became more daring. It was at this time that Polish colonists began to appear in the area. The first victim of the "werewolves" in Yolsa were three Soviet soldiers. An autopsy showed that they were simply beaten to death. The Soviet counterintelligence decided that these Red Army soldiers were the victims of the Werewolf detachment, which operated in the vicinity of Yöls and consisted of about thirty people. According to operational information, this group was headed by

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former SD officer. It was assumed that it was he and his people who were responsible for the murders of German communists who began to cooperate with the Polish authorities. But soon the informant was "figured out" and killed. The NKVD and the Polish authorities stopped receiving any information about the actions of this detachment. Meanwhile, the "werewolves" continued to attack the Poles. Over time, the detachment not only did not shrink, but actually doubled.

The first step in the elimination of this partisan formation was taken when the Polish authorities found a small German colony, whose inhabitants were fluent in Polish. These Germans said that that Werewolf detachment broke into three small groups. One of them continued to operate in the Olsa district, while the other two went to Trebnitz and Milch, respectively. With such accurate information, the Polish security forces decided to clear the local forests. The swiftness of this operation made it possible to take the "werewolves" by surprise in one small forest farm. A fight ensued. Most of the squad

managed to destroy. The remnants of the "werewolves" fled in the direction of Milch. After this operation, virtually nothing was heard about the actions of these partisans.

Meanwhile, in the autumn-winter of 1945-1946, anarchy continued to rule in Breslau and its environs. It was intensified by the fact that partisan detachments of Polish nationalists started the war against the Polish communists. There was a uniform war of all against all. An American war correspondent recalled that as night fell, shooting and explosions could be heard from the darkness. All these clashes were accompanied by Jewish pogroms and the activation of criminals. One of the Germans, later deported from Breslau, recalled that during the day the communists ruled in the city, and at night - criminals and nationalists. After sunset, civilians simply did not dare to go out into the street. Against the backdrop of this internecine war, the German partisans felt more than at ease. The surroundings of Breslau, even during the day, looked more like a war zone. In his district, only in the first post-war year, about 150 Polish policemen were killed.

Another hot spot in Silesia was the city of Bunzlau. A large group of Nazi partisans operating in this area consisted of former Wehrmacht employees, NSDAP activists, and Ukrainian nationalists. She repeatedly attacked the Soviet and Polish military. In July 1945, in Bunzlau, a house was blown up, where nine Red Army soldiers were quartered. All of them died (detached houses have always been the object of increased "attention" on the part of the partisans). A few days later, on July 21, six Poles were killed in Bunzlau, including officials of the new administration and several policemen. Their car was riddled with machine gun fire. Among the dead was the new head of the city, Bolesław Kubik, a prominent member of the Polish Socialist Party. In August, the activity of "werewolves" did not decline. On the contrary, attacks were carried out one after another.

In the territories that had ceded to Poland, most of the "werewolf" detachments were liquidated only by the middle of 1946. Several attacks were witnessed in 1947, but they were mostly limited to spreading anti-Soviet propaganda. The decrease in the activity of "werewolves" was caused by two factors. Firstly, the Polish police and security services have gained sufficient experience in the fight against partisan formations. Until 1945, only the Red Army had such experience. In addition, an active policy of infiltration of agents into the "werewolves" movement was launched. It took a long time for this tactic to bear fruit. Secondly, and more importantly, the Poles began to carry out mass deportations of Germans. In 1946, Operation Swallow was launched, which deprived the "werewolves" of the opportunity to hide among German refugees and civilians. The very base of the German partisan movement was destroyed.

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Conclusion

Based on various sources, we tried to give a vivid picture of the battles for Breslau, which for a long time did not fall into the field of view of the domestic reader. The "miracle of Breslau" began to be talked about in Germany as early as 1945. After the war, much was written about this in German historiography. But almost not a word was devoted to this plot (which is quite understandable) in Soviet historiography. At the same time, in Germany, under the "miracle of Breslau", many researchers meant something of their own. But almost all researchers relied on a few simple facts. Firstly, for three months, poorly armed German troops managed to resist at least three times the superior forces of the Red Army. Secondly, the capitulation of the city, which took place on May 6, 1945, was not the result of the capture of Breslau. Thirdly, by the time of the surrender, German troops continued to control most of the city. Only a few areas in the south and west of Breslau were in the hands of the Red Army. At the same time, units of the Wehrmacht continued to hold quarters from the Wajda to the mouth of the Oder, and in the east to the very Günther bridge.

So how can the "miracle of Breslau" be explained? Generals von Alphen and Niehof themselves named three reasons. During the defense of the city, very close cooperation was established between parts of the Wehrmacht and the civilian population. Despite the arbitrariness of party organs, many of the civilians considered falling into Russian captivity a much greater evil. In addition, during the defense of the city, in which the natives of the local regions took part, a good knowledge of the area affected, which the Red Army could not boast of. The third reason lies in the fact that, having suffered heavy losses, the Soviet command abandoned the idea of storming the city from several sides simultaneously, which gave the Germans a tactical advantage. As a result, even the powerful offensive of the Red Army units during the "Easter battle" did not bring the expected turning point in the battles for Breslau.

After the publication of excerpts from the memoirs of General Niehoff, a discussion broke out in German society. The reason for it was an open letter from Professor Joachim Conrad, who was a resident of Breslau. In 1956, this letter was rewritten into the article "The End of Breslau". In I. Konrad noted that in fact the "miracle of Breslau" was a tragedy. Not without criticism of General Niehoff himself:

"After respecting the reports of General Niehoff, one might get the impression that the defense of Breslau was an exemplary strategic operation, when complete unity of the army units and the civilian population was achieved to protect the city from the Russians. Perhaps the events that took place in the fortress looked exactly like this from the headquarters. But this point of view is not true. General Niehof emphasizes that he did not allow Gauleiter Hanke to exert even the slightest influence on the course of military operations. But the civilian population has a different point of view."

What were the results of the siege of Breslau? Günter Grundmann's book on the history of Silesia stated:

"The surrender of the bloodless and almost completely destroyed fortress on Sunday, May 6, brought to the surviving 100 thousand civilians in the city not the expected peace and tranquility, but robberies, violence and new fires, in which the city castle of Frederick the Great, which survived the battles, burned down."

Maybe there was some truth in these words, but the number of civilians who survived during the siege was much larger. Hornig in his memoirs spoke of at least 200,000 inhabitants.

If we talk about losses during the battles for Breslau, they were very high. The "fortress garrison", which Breslau held for three months, consisted of 35,000 Wehrmacht employees and 10,000 men drafted into the Volkssturm. Until the end of March, about 6,000 wounded were taken out of the city via the "air bridge". In Breslau itself,

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about 5 thousand wounded (as of the beginning of May 1945). That is, the garrison during the fighting lost about 11-12 thousand people wounded. If we talk about the number of dead soldiers, then German sources give a figure of 6 thousand people. At the same time, the civilian population during the fighting lost about 10 thousand people killed and the same number wounded.

When calculating the Soviet forces that stormed Breslau, it turns out that the encirclement, which invariably shrank, was about 150 thousand Red Army soldiers. From Soviet sources it follows that the losses of the Red Army during the siege amounted to 5 thousand officers and 60 thousand soldiers. At least 5 thousand Soviet officers were buried in the military cemetery in the south of Wrocław.

The commandant of the fortress, General Niehof himself, cited somewhat different figures in his memoirs. In his opinion, about 50 thousand Wehrmacht soldiers and

Volkssturmists, of whom 6,000 were killed and another 29,000 wounded. That is, the total losses of the German garrison amounted to 29 thousand people, which leaves about 58% of the total number of the German group. If this figure is correct, then this is a very large proportion of military losses in manpower. He estimated losses among the civilian population at 80 thousand people, which seems to be a somewhat overestimated figure. When Niehof speaks of Soviet losses, he proceeds from the figure of 30-40 thousand killed, referring to Soviet sources, which he does not name. In any case, Breslau managed to pin down about 12 Soviet divisions, seven of which were on the front line, and another five were used as operational reserves.

In the historical literature, the question is quite legitimately asked: was the defense of Breslau necessary, and did it make sense for the German units to hold the city for such a long time? It seems quite logical to refer to the conclusions of the historian of the Second World War, General Kurt von Tippelskirch. In his History of the Second World War, he expressed the idea that for Germany the war was finally lost when, under the onslaught of the superior forces of the Red Army, the German front along the Vistula collapsed. After that, Soviet troops were able to begin penetrating enemy territory along the entire width of the front from Poland to the Oder. The Soviet offensive in Silesia actually served only as a flank cover for the main goal of the Soviet command - the capture of Berlin. The protectorates of Bohemia and Moravia, Slovakia and Hungary would sooner or later fall if the Soviet troops took Berlin and Vienna. From this point of view, the defense of Breslau made strategic sense only in the first phase of the Red Army's winter offensive of 1945, that is, in January and February. At this point, the battles for Breslau could pin down the advancing Soviet divisions, which, in turn, could allow the German command to create a new front line that would stretch from Lower Silesia to the Sudetenland foothills. In addition, the defense of the fortress was justified from the point of view that it made it possible to ensure the withdrawal of columns of refugees to the Silesian mountains or westward to Saxony and Thuringia. But, in fact, the need for the defense of Breslau at Tippelskirch is exhausted by these tactical tasks. By the beginning of April, the Red Army was able to achieve the fulfillment of all the tasks assigned to it, despite the fact that Breslau continued to fetter the actions of several Soviet divisions. After February 1945, the defense of Breslau made no strategic sense. The most logical date for the surrender of Breslau was to be the time of relative stabilization of the Sudeten Front. That is, the city without any damage to the Wehrmacht could be handed over to the Soviet troops in the second half of February, in extreme cases, in early March. But as we remember, this time was marked by only one change: General von Alphen was replaced as commandant of the fortress by General Niehof. And it was from this period that the defense of Breslau entered a new phase, associated with enormous losses in manpower. By and large, after the indicated date, the battles for Breslau lost all meaning. It can be assumed that even the High Command of the Wehrmacht did not expect that the city would be able to resist the Soviet onslaught for so long. But, nevertheless, despite all the considerations expressed, Tippelskirch proclaimed the defense of Breslau "one of the most glorious pages in the history of the German people." This circumstance, after the war, allowed Ernst Hornig to talk about "the meaning and senselessness of the defense of the city."

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Annex 1. The combat composition of the German units defending Breslau

During the formation of fortress military units, infantry regimental groups were first created, which were designated by the Latin letters A, B, C, etc. (see the text of the book). In early February, they were transformed into ordinary regiments, which were named after their commander.

I. Fortress headquarters Commandant of the fortress from September 1944 to January 1945 Major General Krause

Ta: Captain Erdman

Assistant Officer: Oberleutnant Richter Quartermaster: Colonel von Hauenschild Pa (adjutant): Capt. (later Major) Böck

Headquarters for the erection of the "North" position Head: Captain Lenzen Artillery officer: Captain Peltseder

Headquarters "South"

Chief: Captain Seifert

Artillery Officer: Capt. Rolfes Tank Destroyer Officer: Capt. Schmedes

Commandant of the fortress from February 1 to March 8, 1945: Major General Alphen Commandant of the fortress from March 9 to May 6, 1945: Lieutenant General Niehof (from April 1, 1945 - General of Infantry)

Commandant's Representative: Colonel Teasler Commandant's Orderly: Lieutenant Fisher Operations:

Ta: Major Otto

01: Captain Erdman

ŷŷ: Oberleutnant Scheffinius

04: Oberleutnant Pellegrini.

Other employees

ŷŷ: Oberleutnant Berger

Ga (1 a/oge): Oberleutnant Richter

I a/Mess: Captain Rishanek

Quartermaster Division (1 0):

Major Pel, starting in mid-February 1945, Major Fuchs

02: Oberleutnant Finzen Officer in charge of supply and civil liaison: Oberleutnant Hösel

Ammunition: Captain Krawuchke, Lieutenant Zeelmeier

TU a (quartermaster): staff chief Künel, staff chief Schneider

Uk (transport): Capt. Willner

GU 6: serf doctor senior field doctor Dr. Mehling

Adjutant: junior field doctor Geshe.

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Adjutants:

Major Beck

officer of the National Socialist leadership captain van Bruck employee lieutenant Pampukh

Captain Langen (air evacuation order)

Communication: Oberleutnant Franke

Headquarters commandant: Captain Puin, Oberleutnant Zeevan, Oberleutnant Peterman.

Air Liaison Officer: Oberleutnant Kunze, Oberleutnant Neumann

Representatives of special arms of the armed forces (at the same time unit commanders):

artillery commander: colonel Urbatis

sapper commander: Major Hameister

Chief of Communications: Lieutenant Colonel, Dipl.-Ing. Wittenberg

military aviation (at the same time ensuring the operation of the Gandau airfield): lieutenant colonel von Friedeburg

P. Military units A. Independent infantry regiments

More's Regiment

Compound:

Part of the 49th Jaeger training battalion (Breslau-Karlowitz), as well as part of the 83rd Jaeger training battalion (Trautenau)

Regimental Commander: Major, later Lieutenant Colonel More

Three battalions under the command of Major Tilgner (including the 49th Jaeger training battalion)

Major Tenschert (83rd Jaeger Training Battalion) + Oberleutnant Fritz

Regimental units: 1 infantry gun company, 1 tank destroyer company, 1 communications platoon, 1 transport platoon

At the beginning of March, the Seybold battalion, which began to form at the end of February, entered the regiment (commander - Major Seybold, who arrived in Breslau on February 26).

In mid-April, the "Seibold Regimental Group" was formed within the regiment, which included the following units:

Battalion Wuttke (from the Sauer Regiment - "Northern" Front) Roge Battalion (from the SS Regiment Besslein)
Airborne Battalion 1/26

Board I./EaPseÿÿgtÿdeeg 26

police battalion

Platoon from the remnants of the Seibold Battalion

Regiment of the Waffen-SS Besslein Composition:

a) from the Waffen-SS

SS training battalion (infantry guns - Deutsche Lissa) SS training battalion (Panzergrenadiers - Breslau)

School of Junior Commanders (Breslau)

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b) from army formations

army school for non-commissioned officers in Striegau (captain Sommer) 28th training battalion (transport - Schweidnitz)

8th training battalion (veterinarians - Schweidnitz)

Regimental Commander: Obersturmbannführer Besslein Ta: Captain Ebergart Seifert

I. Battalion of Hauptsturmführer Greger

P. Battalion Hauptsturmführer Zielske

Sh. Battalion of Captain Sommer

GU. Obersturmbannführer Scharpwinkel Battalion

Regiment subdivisions: platoon of signalmen, 2 training companies of junior commanders (Hauptsturmführer Roge and Captain Zitzman), a company of heavy (120 mm) mortars.

The composition of the battalion P after the death of Zielske was transferred to the 609th division. A new battalion P was formed already under the command of Captain Zitzman. After the captain was wounded, it was led by Hauptsturmführer Roge.

Wehl Regiment (Luftwaffe)

Composition: companies of service personnel and airfield personnel

Regimental Commander: Luftwaffe Colonel Vehl

Strength: 4 to 6 battalions, including 1 reserve battalion

Of the battalion commanders known: captain von Kleist and captain Günther

Sauer Regiment

Composition: 49th Jaeger Training Battalion (Breslau-Karlowitz) Regiment Commander: Colonel Sauer

Strength: 3 to 4 battalions

Regiment Hanf, later Felhagen

Formed from various regiments

Regiment commanders: from the beginning of February - Colonel Göllnitz. After he was wounded at the end of March, the regiment was led by Captain Hanf, then Colonel Felhagen

Strength: 3 to 4 battalions

I. Fortress training battalion "Breslau"

Commander: Major Count Seydlitz (died May 2, 1945) Adjutant: Lieutenant Schoenfelder

Adjutant: Lieutenant Schoenfelder

P. Battalion

Commander: Lieutenant Colonel Rotanzel (in the beginning - the commander of the army school of non-commissioned officers Frankenstein)

B. 609th division

Subdivisions of divisional subordination: reinforced signal company and field gendarmerie platoon

Division Commander: Major General, later Lieutenant General Ruff Ta: Captain Mooshake

ÿÿ: (quartermaster) captain Ludwig

Pa: (adjutant) Major Müller

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The division headquarters was formed at the end of January 1945 in Dresden, a few days later it was transferred by rail to Liegnitz, from where the headquarters reached Breslau during the night march. With the exception of the division commander and the captain in charge of the supply of weapons and equipment, none of the officers had experience in the headquarters of the DIVISION.

The division was formed from various military units that ended up in Silesia, including the school of non-commissioned officers Frankenstein, the training courses of the Fahnejunker Gniesen, the Hohensaltz tank destroyer company, as well as individual units of the 269th division, which failed to break through south to the main parts Wehrmacht.

The division consisted of 3 infantry regiments. Their commanders were: Colonel Reinkober, Major Kersten, Major Schultz.

B. Artillery, tank destroyers, sappers, signalmen

Artillery Regiment Breslau

Compound:

a) Fortress Batteries 3048, 3049, 3075, 3076, 3081 and 3082 b) 28th Light Artillery Training Unit (Buntsau) 28th Heavy Artillery Training Unit (Buntsau) c) 859th Reserve Artillery Unit

remains of the artillery of the 17th Infantry Division

Regimental Commander: Colonel Urbatis Number and types of batteries:

15 batteries of German light field howitzers (caliber 105 millimeters) 4 batteries of German heavy howitzers (caliber 150 millimeters)

1 battery of German heavy mortars (caliber 210 millimeters)

4 batteries of Soviet 120mm guns

5 batteries of Soviet 76.2 mm guns

1 battery of Polish 75mm guns

1 battery of Yugoslav 75mm guns

1 battery of Italian 70mm guns

Total - 32 batteries

In addition, anti-aircraft artillery was subordinate to the regiment commander.

The anti-aircraft artillery of the fortress was composed of the 570th heavy anti-aircraft artillery unit, the 137th anti-aircraft artillery training unit, the 150 anti-aircraft artillery regiment, the 47LU anti-aircraft artillery unit and several anti-aircraft batteries of the Imperial Labor Service. After the loss of several batteries on the outskirts of Breslau, the total number of field and anti-aircraft artillery was about 200 barrels.

Division of artillery units

Group "North": Major Hartl

Group "West": Captain Froner

Group "Southwest" Captain Giardet

Artillery Group of the 609th Division: Major Siebert

Accurate data on the strength of artillery groups have been preserved only in relation to the "North":

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3 batteries of German light field howitzers

1 battery of German heavy field howitzers

1 battery of Polish 75mm guns

1 battery of Italian 70mm guns

Breslau Tank Destroyer Unit Commander: Oberleutnant Retter

1st armored company (Oberleutnant Fenzke)

Combat Strength:

1 assault tank TU with a gun from the "Panther" and ammunition for 500 rounds

2 assault guns (chassis Sh)

6 assault guns with a 148 cannon - the remains of the 311th assault gun brigade (platoon commander - sergeant major, later Lieutenant Hartman)

6 R7P tanks with EI gun. 38 (caliber 20 millimeters)

4 unarmored self-propelled carriages with a light field howitzer mounted on them (caliber 105 millimeters)

The 2nd and 3rd companies were equipped with "ofenrrors" and "Pupchens" 4th company (commander - Oberleutnant Albrecht) consisted of soldiers armed with faustpatrons

Sapper Regiment "Breslau"

28th sapper reserve training battalion (Breslau - Kozel). From it, in January 1945, after the alarm was announced in the fortress, the "Möller Battle Group" began to form.

Regimental Commander: Major Hameister

The 1st battalion (Captain Muller), the P battalion are designed to undermine and carry out combat missions, the Sh (Captain Rother) was part of the 609th division, the GU battalion had as its main task the strengthening of fortifications, the U battalion was focused on mining and undermining strategic objects .

There were two independent platoons of personnel serving the Goliath tankettes (each with 48 tankettes), commanded by Lieutenants Kone and Teryung.

In addition, the regiment included: 2nd company of the 6th technical battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Schulze of 10 Volkssturm construction battalions

Communication Regiment "Breslau" Composition: communications unit of the 17th Infantry Division Technical staff of the city telegraph and post

Regimental Commander: Lieutenant Colonel Wittenberg

Officer in charge of telecommunications: Capt. Kunt

I division: two companies of telephone operators and a radio communication company

P division (like the first)

W division is staffed by telegraphers and postal workers

D. Paratroopers

Airborne parachute battalion 1/26 Commander: Captain Trots. Sent to Breslau 25 February

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Airborne parachute battalion of special purpose "Shakht"

Commander: Captain Skau, after being wounded - Captain Zaitz (previously an adjutant). The battalion arrived in Breslau on 5 March

Composition of the battalion:

5th company of Oberleutnant Bikel

6th company of Oberleutnant Hoffman

8th (heavy) company of Oberleutnant Albrecht Schulz

Lieutenant Junghaus Signal Platoon

Unit Physician: Senior Physician Seipp

Treasurer(!): Krueger

Armament:

5th and 6th companies: 18 MG light machine guns, 6 light mortars (60 mm), 54 rifles; in the future, each soldier carried a pistol. In addition, each company had

communications platoon

8th (heavy) company: 3 heavy 80-mm mortars (with a short barrel), 6 heavy machine guns MG 42 (mounted), 4 rifles with an optical sight. In addition, each of the soldiers was armed with a 43 assault rifle and a pistol.

Later, a company of flamethrowers and another COMMUNICATION platoon were added to the battalion.

D. Volkssturm (people's militia)

Commander of the Volkssturm in Breslau: SA Obergruppenführer Herzog Deputy: Aster Liaison Officer with Fortress Headquarters: Battalion Commander of the Wöhl Tower

There were a total of 38 battalions, including:

1 training battalion

1 reserve battalion

10 construction battalions and 26 combat battalions. Of the 26 combat battalions, two were fully staffed by members of the Hitler Youth.

The total number was approximately 15,000 people, that is, the strength of the Volkssturm battalion in Breslau was about 400 people

For more efficient performance of combat missions, most of the Volkssturm battalions were grouped into regimental groups:

Regimental Group Hoeneleiter (Jöls)

Regimental Group Volanke (Breslau)

Regimental Group Franke (Breslau)

Regimental Group Hirsch (Hitler Youth - Breslau)

Overview of the battalions. The names of leaders and hometowns are in parentheses. If there is no indication of the city, then the battalion is formed in Breslau:

a) 71st training battalion (Miyach) 51st reserve battalion (Bur)

6) combat battalions

55th HJ Battalion (Seifert)

56th GU Battalion (Lindenschmidt)

21st Battalion (Koschat, Pflanz-Lignitz) 22nd Battalion (Hanke-Schweidnitz)

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23rd Battalion (Kanter)

24th Battalion (Meinke)

30th Battalion (Bahnwitz)

31st Battalion (Göbel-Roteburg)

32nd Battalion (Böhm)

33rd Battalion (Peuleman)

34th Battalion (Tsöke)

35th Battalion (Zeman-Yols)

36th Battalion (Strauss)

37th Battalion (Torzewski)

41st Battalion (Klose, Kaulshe, Dörzig)

42nd Battalion (Stefan, Merkle)

44th Battalion (Kluger)

46th Battalion (Peshke)

48th Battalion (Störel)

The 52nd battalion (Mende) was staffed by members of the NSKK (National Socialist Driver's Corps), acted as a transport unit. Later he was assigned to the sapper units

66th Battalion (Fischer)

67th Battalion (Count Kaiserling - Militish, Trebnitz)

68th Battalion (Kaiserling, Stein, Koch)

74th battalion (Pötsch) completed by Breslau railwaymen

75th Battalion (Bishop)

76th battalion (Herpishböm) formed from the protection of post offices

c) 10 construction battalions 38th battalion (Augustin)

40th battalion (Scharz, Shymek) 43rd battalion (Shtemler) 45th battalion (Schoenwolf) 49th battalion (Schrivert)

50th Battalion (von Hollenufer) 54th Battalion (Roll)

59th Battalion (Striker)

72nd Battalion (Nain)

73rd Battalion (Knollau)

D. Breslau Fire Regiment

Regiment Commander: Colonel Gribova

Unit commanders: Lieutenant Colonel Adama, Lieutenant Colonel Patett, Major Kuleman, Major Horst

Strength: 6 teams totaling 600 people with 44 fire engines, 12 special vehicles and 25 fire pumps

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Appendix 2. Brief chronicle of the siege of Breslau

January 12th. The army of Marshal Konev, in order to capture the capture of Silesia, undertakes an offensive from the bridgehead in Baranovo. The German defensive line was instantly broken through. From that moment on, Breslau, including refugees, had about 1 million inhabitants.

January 16th. The advanced tank units of the Red Army reach the borders of Silesia and approach the Upper Silesian industrial region.

January 18th. The population of Kreuzburg, Rosenberg and other cities of Upper Silesia is urgently evacuated.

January 19. Gauleiter Hanke orders the evacuation of the population of the districts located east of the Oder.

January 20th . An order from the Gauleiter apparatus that women with children leave Breslau as a matter of urgency.

January 20-22. Columns of refugees stretch from Breslau towards the Silesian mountains.

January 21. The so-called "Black Sunday". Fearing a breakthrough into the city of advanced Soviet tank units, all bridges across the Oder are being hastily mined and prepared for destruction. In the afternoon, the order of the Gauleiter apparatus that women with children should leave the city and head to Opperau or in the direction of Kant is broadcast over loudspeakers. During the flight to the west and southwest, many small children die in the cold (mass graves in South Park and near the New Market).

January 22. The provincial authorities cease their activities and leave the city. The departments and teaching staff of the Breslau University of Technology are transferred to Dresden. The Evangelical Consistory moves its seat to Görlitz. Approximately 250 thousand inhabitants remain in the city. Refugees arrive from rural areas. Breslau's train stations are in chaos and confusion.

January 23 . Wehrmacht units are housed in the building of the mother house "Betanina". The management of the institution orders that all medical personnel be put on high alert.

January 23. "In the territory east of Oppeln, and also between Namslau and Jölsa

the Bolsheviks launched powerful counterattacks, supported by tanks.

January 24th. "Opposite the Oder, between Kozel and Brig, the onslaught of the enemy intensified. Fierce fighting is going on in this sector of the front, especially near Gleiwitz and Oppeln. In the combat area east of Breslau, decisive counterattacks launched by our forces were able to drive the Bolsheviks out of some areas.

The 25th of January. The Gauleiter apparatus orders that all women, as well as men under 16 and over 60, must leave the city. Negotiations of Catholic and Evangelical clergy with the commandant of the fortress, Major General Krause. The commandant makes a request that the clergy provide assistance to the civilian population and care for the wounded in military hospitals.

The 25th of January. "Enemy advanced units are approaching Breslau from the southeast. To the east of the city, all enemy attacks ended in failure.

January 26 . Parts of the Red Army bypass Brig from the flanks, after which they begin to create a bridgehead in Steinau.

January 26th. "Between Kosel and Breslau, our forces were able to prevent numerous attempts by the Soviets to force the Oder. To the east and northeast of Breslau, the enemy is creating a defensive line.

January 27th. "Yesterday the enemy made unsuccessful attempts to break through the Breslau defense line. To the northwest of Breslau fierce fighting is going on. In some sectors of the front, the enemy is undertaking counterattacks.

28 January. At 6 o'clock in the morning, on the orders of Gauleiter Hanke, the second burgomaster, Dr. Spielhagen, was shot near the Breslau Ring. The population is frightened by posters announcing

26 Italicized excerpts from the messages of the Wehrmacht High Command.

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executions.

28 January. "Our defense forces along the Oder, in which several Volkssturm units take part, prevented the further formation of an enemy bridgehead between Kosel and Glogau. Bloody battles go on with varying success. Several Bolshevik attacks were repulsed. The enemy offensive on the "northern" front was unsuccessful, it could not break through our line of defense in Breslau.

January 29. Numerous Bolshevik attacks continue along the Oder between Kosel and Breslau. Eliminated or significantly reduced several enemy footholds. Despite courageous resistance in Steinau, the enemy was able to gain a foothold on the western bank of the Oder.

January 30 . A team from the military school during the fighting in the east of the city suffers heavy losses. An SS officer conveys to Evangelical priest Ernst Hornig an order from Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler that all clergy must leave the city within 24 hours. Hornig declares the impossibility of carrying out this order.

January 30. "From the territory of the bridgehead in Olau, the enemy is trying to move further to the west. In the Steinau area, our units defeated more numerous enemy forces and restored contact with the soldiers stubbornly defending themselves in this place.

January 31st. Catholic priests meet with Gauleiter Hanke, who declares that he knows nothing about Himmler's order and recommends contacting the Gestapo for clarification.

January 31st. "At Olau and on both sides of Steinau, during our counterattack, the Bolsheviks were intercepted, who were trying to advance from their bridgehead near the Oder."

1st of February. Gestapo Breslau allows 10 Evangelical and 35

Catholic priests.

February 3rd. General Koch-Epach invites Colonel von Alphen to take the place of the seriously ill Major General Krause as the commandant of the fortress. Von Alphen was promoted to major general. About 35 thousand employees of the Wehrmacht and 10 thousand Volkssturmists were gathered for the defense of the city. One of the companies of the Volkssturm is located in Betanin.

February 5th. "The enemy, from the territory of his bridgehead on the banks of the Oder, launched an offensive with large forces on both sides of Brig. There are fierce battles going on here. Otherwise, the situation on the Oder front has not changed significantly.

February 7th. Breslau is visited by State Secretary Naumann, one of the leading members of the Reich Propaganda Ministry. He delivers to the officers and local party functionaries the speech "Breslau must be held at all costs."

February 9th. The new commandant of the fortress gives in parts a long order "You must believe in the future of Germany."

February 9th. "The Bolsheviks launched a powerful offensive from the Steinau region."

February 10th. Soviet troops from the bridgehead in Steinau reach the New Market and rush through Luben to Liegnitz.

February 10th. "In the Breslau-Lignitz-Glogau combat area, the Soviets threw large forces into battle. Despite the fierce resistance of our units, they were able to advance to the west".

February 11-13. Soviet tank units strike on both sides of the highway in the direction of Kant. The encirclement of Breslau begins from the west. The railway connection with Breslau along the branch line leading to Hirschberg was interrupted.

12th of February. "The battle for Lower Silesia is intensifying. To the west of Breslau, our forces, which launched a counterattack, were able to push the enemy back south to the Kant-Kostenbült area, which prevented him from uniting with the enemy forces, which are located north-west of Breslau on the bridgehead in Brig.

February 13. "In Lower Silesia, our units launched a counterattack, which thwarted the Soviet attempt to cut off the Breslau fortress from the main German forces. On a small sector of the front southwest of the city, the enemy lost about 60 tanks in battle.

February 12-14. An ambulance train awaiting its departure at the Freiburg railway station cannot leave the city to head to Hirschberg.

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The 14th of February . The High Command of the Wehrmacht announces the closure of the encirclement of Soviet troops around Breslau. From the south, it is still possible to deliver ammunition to the city and take out the wounded.

February 14-16. Refugees from the surrounding villages seek shelter in Breslau.

February, 15 . Major General von Alphen announces the blockade of Breslau. Appeal to the civilian population: "We must not lose courage!".

February, 15. "Defensive lines have been rebuilt in Lower Silesia. Near Breslau and Glogau, our units in a bloody struggle were able to repulse all the attacks of the Bolsheviks.

February 16-17. The first Soviet propaganda leaflets were dropped on the city, which were addressed to both soldiers and civilians.

February 16th. "Powerful enemy attacks southwest of Breslau and west of Bunzau, as well as on both sides of Zagan, were a complete failure."

February 17. A new attempt by Soviet troops to take the city from the south. A military hospital located in South Park is urgently evacuated. During the evacuation, the head doctor Gubrikh dies.

18th of February. "There are fierce battles on the southern and southwestern front of Breslau. The enemy is suffering heavy losses.

February 19th. "The Breslau garrison, well-entrenched in the south and west, successfully defends itself against the enemy, weary of battles."

February 20th. "The defenders of Breslau were able to beat off enemy attacks on the southwestern and eastern fronts."

February 19-20. Fierce fighting on the ring road and in the area of the so-called "Kinder Tsoften".

February 21st. Breslau's largest medical institution, the All Saints Hospital, is under fire, but continues to operate.

February 21st. "Enemy attacks south of Breslau ran into fierce resistance from our units."

February 24-25. Soviet troops reach the building of the cuirassier barracks. 25th anniversary of the adoption of the party program of the NSDAP. Hitler and Gauleiter Hanke exchange congratulatory radiograms. Air supply to Breslau begins with Force 18 aircraft.

February 23. "The enemy was able to penetrate to an insignificant depth from the south into individual quarters of Breslau."

February 26 . Parts of the Red Army occupy the Dyurgoy gas plant. Fierce street fighting in the southern quarters of the city is ceasing.

February 26th. "The garrisons of Breslau and Glogau are fighting fierce street battles. The enemy has not 'succeeded in any meaningful success'.

28th of February . The flow of refugees from the southern districts of the city to the northern quarters or areas bordering the Oder.

2nd of March . Transmission on the wave of the German radio false message "The hour of your release has struck!". An attempt to misinform German soldiers and civilians. General Niehof is appointed as Major General von Alphen's successor as commandant of the fortress. Von Alphen prepares to hand over the cases.

March, 3rd. Radio address by Gauleiter Hanke. Entry into force of the order to counteract the spread of "enemy rumors".

5th of March. General Niehof arrives by plane in the burning Breslau

March 6b. Destruction of quarters near the Kaiser Bridge in order to build an "internal airfield" in the future.

March 7th. The order of the commandant of the fortress, General Niehof and Gauleiter Hanke "Labor service for everyone." Death penalty for non-compliance with this order.

March 8 . Parts of the Wehrmacht, with the help of the city councilor for construction, Kurt Liebig, are taking measures regarding the city sewerage.

Since March 8. General Niehof transmits in parts the message of Colonel-General Schörner that he will release Breslau at all costs.

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10th of March. The onset of spring thaw. The need for laying telephone lines.

11th of March . Increased bombardment and artillery shelling of Breslau. Events dedicated to the fallen heroes in parts of the Wehrmacht. Gala evening at Betanina.

March 12th. "The defenders of the Breslau fortress hold their positions in fierce street battles. In the battles lasting for weeks, the enemy is unsuccessfully trying to break into the southern part of the city. In the period from February 10 to February 28, 41 enemy tanks and 239 enemy guns were destroyed in these battles. The enemy suffers huge losses, which amount to about 6,700 people killed.

March 15th. Of the 55 aircraft with ammunition, only half manage to land at the Gandau airfield. The supply of the city through the "air bridge" becomes difficult due to the effective measures of the Soviet anti-aircraft artillery. The burials of the dead are carried out exclusively in mass graves.

March 15th. "The fortress of Breslau is successfully defended. The garrison repels attacks made by the advancing enemy from the north and south.

March 16 . A powerful air raid on the Nikolaevsky suburb. The target is FAMO enterprises. During the bombing, the temple in the name of St. Nicholas was destroyed.

March 19 "Breslau and Glogau are a role model in the cooperation of the fighting units of the Wehrmacht, Volkssturm and civilian structures, which makes it possible to successfully repel the onslaught of the enemy."

March 22 . Three large groups of residents are evacuated from east to north in the Elbing area.

March 23 . Hitler gives the order to send eight cargo gliders with heavy infantry guns to Breslau. General Niehoff's objections are ignored. Seven out of eight gliders do not reach their destination.

March 24. Fires on Ofener- and Palm-strasse.

March 25. "The defenders of the fortresses of Breslau and Glogau repulsed all the attacks made by the enemy"

March 27 . Soviet propaganda leaflets are dropped on Breslau, which expose the terrorist methods of Gauleiter Hanke's rule. The German units are experiencing a shortage of ammunition and weapons.

March 27th. "Yesterday, the enemy offensive was thwarted by the fierce resistance of the brave defenders of Breslau, who, since February 12, have been fighting exclusively in adverse conditions. The Soviets are suffering huge losses. In addition to those mentioned earlier, another 64 enemy tanks were hit."

30th of March . Following the model of the assassination attempt on Hitler, unknown people blow up the party premises.

30th of March. "The Wehrmacht report says: in the fortress of Breslau, the 1st company of the SS regiment, commanded by SS Untersturmführer Budka, showed miracles of heroism. Defending herself in the basement of a burning house, where the temperature reached from 50° to 60°, thanks to the indomitable will of the soldiers, she thwarted the enemy's plans to break through our defenses. The enemy himself suffers huge losses.

March 31. Rumors are circulating around the city about the upcoming powerful offensive of the Soviet troops. Late in the evening, a powerful shelling and bombardment of the city begins.

April 1st. The beginning of the "Easter battle". A massive Soviet air raid on Breslau. Constant bombing of the city center. Fires everywhere. Parts of the Red Army take the Gandau airfield.

April 1st. "After many hours of artillery preparation, the enemy attacked the fortress of Breslau with large forces from the west. The resilience of the defenders made it possible to repel the offensive. Several attacks were repulsed.

April 2 . Continuation of the Soviet offensive. In the western park, units of the Red Army seize the building of a boarding school for the blind. The city center is on fire. Oberburgomaster Leichtenstern is littered with the ruins of the town hall. Military hospitals are overcrowded, some with over a thousand wounded. Breslau is shrouded in clouds of smoke, dust and burning.

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2 April. "The defenders of Breslau repulse the powerful attacks of enemy tanks and aircraft."

April 3rd. "From the western direction, the Bolsheviks continue to advance, using large formations of tanks and aircraft. Bold defenders hold their ground."

April, 4. "The enemy continues to attack the fortress of Breslau with large forces. After heavy fighting, the defenders managed to push back the Russians who had broken through.

5th of April. "Fierce fighting continues in the western districts of Breslau and in the north near the harbor."

b April. "The enemy continues to storm Breslau only from the western direction. Bold defenders reflect all attacks. In fierce defensive battles, the fortress regiment under the command of Major Mora, which not only staunchly defends itself, but also undertakes decisive counterattacks, especially distinguished itself.

April 9-11. New massive Soviet air raids from the south and west. Increased artillery fire.

April 10th. "On the southern and southwestern fronts of Breslau, the Bolsheviks, after the most powerful artillery preparation, again attempted an assault, which was repulsed by the garrison after the loss of insignificant urban areas."

11 April. "The defenders of Breslau continue to repel powerful attacks made from the south and from the west. They managed to eliminate the breakthrough of enemy forces into the territory of the cemetery of St. Bernhardin, located to the west of Manfred von Richthofen Square.

12th of April. "The Soviets will continue to try to break through the defenses from the south and from the west with massive bombardments. Local breakthroughs of positions are eliminated in fierce battles.

April 13 . Rumors of the death of President Roosevelt are spreading in Breslau.

14th of April . The emergence of new rumors in the possible release of the city. Hundreds of women are building the runway.

15 April. "The brave defenders of Breslau repulsed all attacks made on the fortress from the western direction."

April 16 . All girls and women between the ages of 16 and 35 must become "assistants of the Wehrmacht".

April 18th . Bombing and shelling of various parts of the city. Fights for the quarters of Odertor. Soviet troops are trying to break through from west to north.

April 18th. "Fierce defensive battles continue on the western front of Breslau"

April 18-19. The Germans are conducting defensive battles in the western districts of the city. Soviet troops take control of the railway dam near the Pöpelwitz station. During the offensive, 25 Soviet tanks were lost. The Germans are suffering heavy losses.

19 April. "The brave defenders of Breslau repulsed the newly launched Russian attacks on the southern and western fronts."

20 April . Gauleiter reads out congratulations to Adolf Hitler on the radio.

April 20-22. Fights for the bunker at Strigauer Platz. A military hospital is taken out of the bunker at the last moment.

25th of April . Evacuation of residents from Strigauer Platz to other parts of the city. A clear lack of housing.

25th of April. "Breslau garrison continues to repulse Soviet attacks."

26 April. "The brave defenders of Breslau repelled all attacks. In the exemplary military cooperation of Wehrmacht units, Volkssturm units and civilian structures, the fortress has been held since February 17, despite the superiority of the Soviets in technology and manpower.

April 28th. "In Breslau, the Soviet units managed to make several breakthroughs in the defense line."

April 29 . Reports that Göring has been removed from command of the Luftwaffe for health reasons. Rumors of Hitler's death, autocratic rule

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Himmler and possible negotiations with the Western powers.

1st . Reports of the death of Hitler, who allegedly died "the death of the brave in the struggle against May Bolshevism." The order of the commandant of the fortress, General Niehoff, in parts "I remain at the head of you."

1st of May. "The heroic defenders of Breslau again repulsed all the attacks of the Bolsheviks."

May 2. A new wave of rumors about the upcoming release of Breslau.

May 2-5. Air raids on Breslau.

May 3rd Powerful artillery bombardment of the city center. Meeting of Catholic and Evangelical clergy.

May 4th. Meeting of the clergy with General Niehof. An attempt by the Germans to send parliamentarians to the Soviet positions.

5 May. The resumption of bombing and artillery shelling of Breslau. The spread of rumors that General Niehof refused to accept the terms of surrender presented by the Soviet side.

6 May. Early in the morning - the flight of Gauleiter Hanke. Meeting General Niehof with General Gluzdovsky. Capitulation of Breslau. Late in the evening Soviet troops enter the city.

May 7th Disarmament of the Wehrmacht. Most of the German prisoners of war are sent to the camp in Hundsfield.

9th May. Report of the High Command of the Wehrmacht on the fall of Breslau. The beginning of robberies and excesses in the city.

9th May. "The defenders of Breslau, who had repelled Soviet attacks for more than two months, succumbed at the last moment to superior enemy forces."

May 10. Poles begin to actively move to Silesia, who establish their own authorities. The Polish militia organizes terror against the German civilian population.

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